

Scotpress



**ENTERPRISE -
LOG ENTRIES
57**

a STAR TREK
fanzine

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Spetember 1983.

* This is, of course, a typo, and should read CORY KING. We are so used to typing Kirk, that any word beginning KI automatically ends RK. I have religiously corrected the error until now, but a certain fellow-editor dared me to leave it next time I made the typo. So... I did.

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 57.

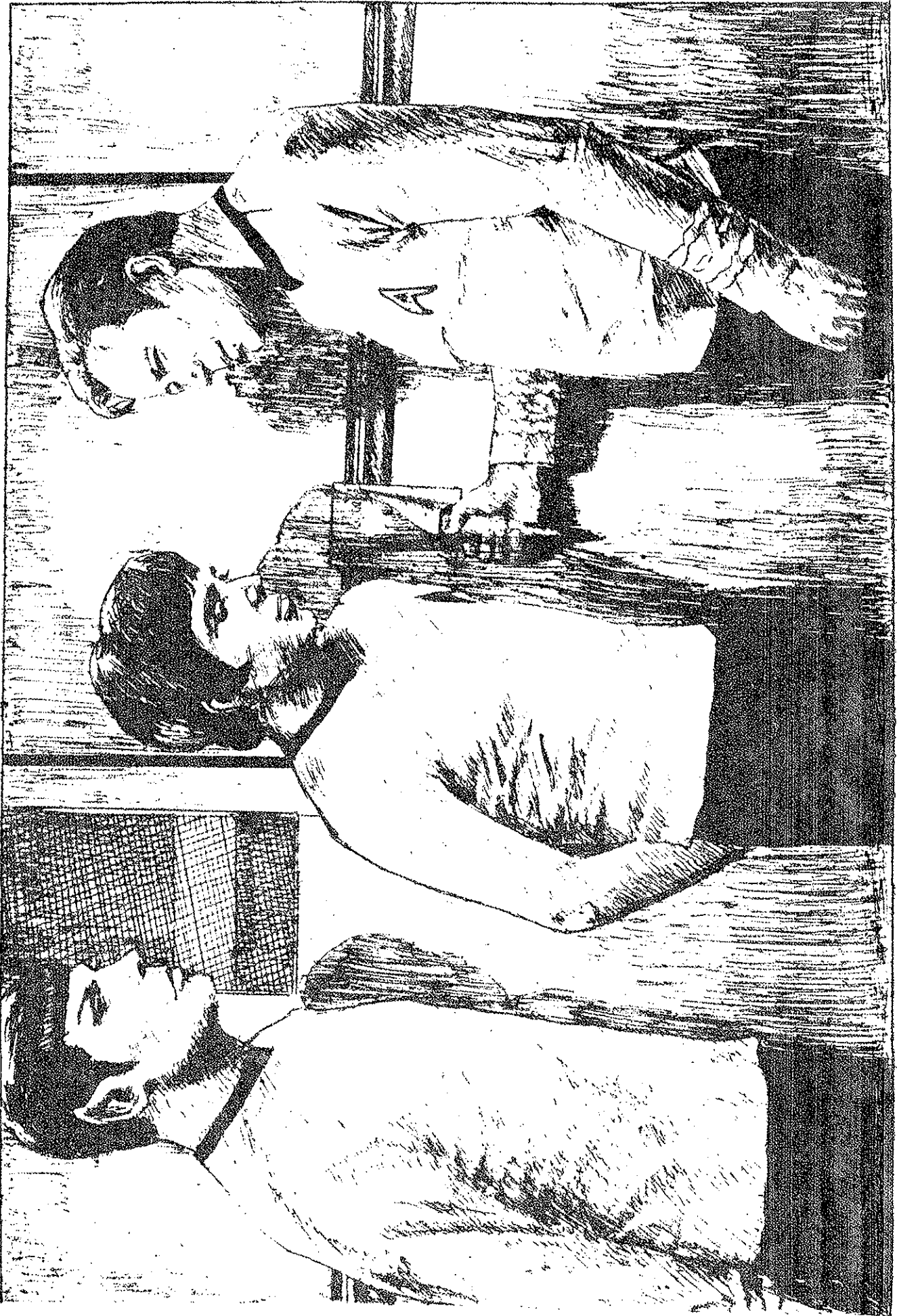
Unhappily this zine sees the departure from the Chain Gang of Lorraine Goodison. Lorraine has been helping us almost since the start of her introduction to fandom, and we will miss her very much. She is moving to Aberdeen, and while we hope that she will be able to visit us occasionally, obviously the distance is too great for her to do so on a regular basis. We would like to thank her very much for all her help, and we are sure you will all join us in wishing her every success in the future.

It was nice to see so many of you at Triple C. We feel that Chris deserves some sort of award for running the first Con for some time at which the fire alarm has not been accidentally set off.

Alternate Universe versions of aired Trek episodes are always a challenge to a writer; in this issue, with "The Hunt", Beth Rayne has taken a new look at part of Squire of Gothos. We also include more of the Son of Vulcan series by Janice Pitkethley, as well as a variety of stories by other writers. We hope you enjoy these stories as much as we did.

Peace,

Valene



ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

by

Liz Butler

Life can be very boring on a Starship in the vastness of space, contemplated Captain James T. Kirk. Right at this moment he thought he would even welcome the appearance of a Klingon cruiser, or a Romulan warship; anything to relieve the monotony of the last couple of weeks. Since their last planetfall in this comparatively unexplored region of the galaxy, they hadn't encountered so much as a stray asteroid.

He glanced round the Bridge. Sulu and Chekov were conversing in low tones, and from the occasional chuckles the subject matter wouldn't bear close scrutiny. Spock, as usual, was occupying his time in some private research at the library computer.

Kirk sighed, wishing - not for the first time - that there was some ongoing task to occupy his duty time on the Bridge. He shifted his gaze to the communications station, where the shapely legs of Uhura were all that was visible of her from where she was lying prone underneath. A minor fault had been giving her problems with static recently, and she was taking advantage of the temporary lull to trace the source of the trouble.

Kirk's attention was diverted from his Communications Officer by the winking light on her console. "Lieutenant!" he called sharply. Too sharply.

Startled, Uhura automatically raised her head to acknowledge, and came into painful contact with the innards of the communications console. With a muffled exclamation she extricated herself and sat up on the floor, rubbing her forehead. She cast a baleful glance at her commanding officer. "Yes, sir?"

Kirk grinned. "Sorry, Uhura, I didn't mean to startle you. There appears to be a call coming in from somewhere."

She scrambled to her feet with considerably more haste than dignity, and made a dive for her board. The rest of the Bridge crew were at once alert, checking their own consoles.

"It's very faint, Captain. I can't quite make out..." She adjusted the settings and listened intently.

"Captain. Sensors are picking up something at extreme range. It could be a vessel. It could even be a planet. I cannot ascertain further at this time."

Kirk turned to face Spock. "Planet? Are there any star systems noted in this area?"

"Negative, Captain. There is nothing in Starfleet records appertaining to this region."

"Sir, I've got it!" exclaimed Uhura. "It's still very faint, but audible. It appears to be a distress signal. A request for medical assistance."

"Can you pinpoint the source and contact them?"

"I'm trying, sir."

"Anything from the sensors yet, Spock?"

"It certainly isn't a vessel, sir. At least, nothing we would designate as a vessel. We're still too far away for definite identification, but I would hazard that it is a small planet."

Uhura turned to face the Captain. "Sir, I can't contact whoever is sending that message. It's obviously an automatic signal as they haven't acknowledged us. There's no knowing how long it has been broadcasting. There may not be anyone left to respond."

"Hmm," murmured Kirk. "Keep trying, Lieutenant."

The relaxed atmosphere of a few minutes ago might never have been; the Bridge was now a hive of furious activity as Kirk flipped the communicator on the arm of his chair. "Bridge to Sickbay."

"Yeah, Jim, what can I do for you?" A nice routine physical, just to relieve the boredom."

Kirk grinned. "No thanks, Bones. I think I'd rather be bored."

"I wasn't thinking of you. I'm so damned fed up, I could even look forward to examining Spock! Sure you wouldn't like a physical?"

"Positive! Anyway, we may have found something for you to do. We just picked up an automatic distress signal requesting medical aid."

"Where the hell from?" McCoy sounded incredulous.

"Haven't the slightest idea. We're trying to locate the source. You'd better get up here."

"I'm on my way."

Spock looked up from his viewer. "Captain, I have ascertained that it is indeed a planet which the sensors have detected. There are definite life readings. It will be in visual range in ten seconds."

"Mr. Sulu, put it on the main screen as soon as it comes in range."

"Aye, Captain."

Seconds later a tiny pinpoint materialised on the main viewer.

"Extreme magnification."

Sulu adjusted a dial and the tiny point rapidly expanded to display a small, bright orange planet, with darker patches scattered over the surface.

The Vulcan scanned the rapid flow of information on his screen. "Planetary mass, approximately that of Earth; temperature and gravity considerably higher. 50% of the surface area is desert, but there are numerous large settlements, with strong indications of advanced technology. Atmosphere - oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, some trace elements." He looked up. "The planet is remarkably similar to Vulcan, Captain."

Great!" muttered a disgruntled McCoy, who had stepped out of the turbo-lift in time to hear Spock's analysis. "Well, I just hope their advanced technology extends as far as air conditioning."

Uhura's report staved off any argument between Spock and McCoy. "Captain, I have established contact with the planet."

"Relay it, Lieutenant. Do we have visual?"

"Yes, sir, but I don't know how good the reception will be."

As she adjusted her controls the main screen lit up to reveal a somewhat hazy image of an imposing-looking male humanoid. He had the pointed ears of a Vulcan, but there the resemblance ended. His skin was pale, almost transparent, the deep-set eyes were a vivid violet, and his hair was snow white. His voice, when he spoke, was deep and faintly melodious.

"Greetings. I am Zaltar, of Calista. I am gratified that you have answered my distress call."

"Calista," echoed Kirk. "Is that the name of your planet?"

"That is correct. May I know to whom I am speaking?"

"Forgive me, Zaltar. I am Captain James T. Kirk, in command of the Starship Enterprise. We represent the United Federation of Planets, and were on a routine survey mission in this sector of space when we picked up your signal. How can we help you?"

"Thank you, Captain Kirk. You do have doctors aboard your vessel?"

Kirk beckoned McCoy forward. "This is Dr. McCoy, my Chief Medical Officer. Perhaps you can acquaint him with the nature of your problem, so that he will know how he can assist you."

The alien inclined his head slightly in acknowledgement of McCoy's presence, then redirected his attention to Kirk. "Forgive me, Captain, but... this is a somewhat delicate matter. Do you, by any chance, have a female doctor available?"

"Female? I'm sorry. I regret that at this particular moment in time all of the doctors on board are male. Does it really make such a difference?"

Zaltar looked slightly apologetic. "I'm rather afraid it does. You see, here on Calista we have lived by ancient rules and customs for generations. One of the oldest of these customs is that a male may not lay hands on a female who does not belong to him."

"I see," said Kirk slowly, with a warning glance at McCoy. "I take it that it is a female who requires medical aid? What of your own doctors? Surely, you must have had occasion in the past to require medical attention."

"Of course. Captain, Calista is a sparsely populated world. We do not have an over-abundance of any highly qualified professional people. At the moment, there is no female suitably... experienced, to deal with this particular problem."

McCoy, who until now had dutifully held his tongue, queried, "Excuse me, sir. I respect your customs, of course, but if the woman is in any danger, is it right to refuse her help, from whatever source?"

"Under less... intimate... circumstances, I might agree with you, Doctor." Zaltar was clearly embarrassed, but went on bravely, "You see, the patient is my wife. She went into labour several hours ago, and there is still no sign of the child's arrival. She is in great pain, but her mother will never permit a male doctor to attend her."

"I'm afraid we seem to have a problem, then," stated Kirk. "It is unfortunate that we don't have a female doctor aboard at the moment. Perhaps..."

"Just a minute, Jim," McCoy interrupted quietly.

"Yes, Bones, what is it?" Kirk turned from the screen.

"Actually, we do have a female doctor aboard."

"Have we? Since when? Who?"

"She's been here all the time... as my Head Nurse."

"Head... Christine Chapel? She's a doctor?"

McCoy nodded. "She was a research physician before she joined Starfleet. It's a long story, but she's perfectly entitled to be called 'Doctor' Chapel."

During this exchange Zaltar had waited patiently, and could contain himself no longer. "Excuse me, do I understand that you do, in fact, have a female doctor?"

Kirk looked back apologetically. "I'm sorry. Yes, it appears that we do. I was not aware that Dr. McCoy's Head Nurse was a qualified doctor. I'm sure she'll be pleased to help in any way she can. I'll call her to the Bridge."

Spock spoke up from his station. "I have already contacted Nurse Chapel. She is on her way."

Almost as he finished speaking the turbolift doors swished open, and Christine Chapel stepped out onto the Bridge.

"Ah, Dr. Chapel. We have a job for you."

Christine looked questioningly at Kirk, eyebrows raised at the unusual use of her legitimate title. As she stepped forward she glanced at McCoy in mute enquiry, wondering what had prompted him to reveal her true status. She was soon to find out, as Zaltar quickly outlined the situation, and she left

to collect the necessary equipment from Sickbay.

Having verified the location for beamdown, the image of Zaltar faded as the contact was broken, and Kirk and McCoy exchanged glances.

"I don't like it, Jim."

"In what way, Bones?"

McCoy ran a finger round his collar absently. "I dunno. It's just that something doesn't quite ring true. Oh, his story's plausible enough, on the surface, but I get the feeling he's not telling us everything."

Support came from an unexpected quarter, as Spock remarked quietly, "I'm afraid I concur with Dr. McCoy. I observed that Zaltar seemed to be... constantly on the alert - almost as if he feared interruption."

"Yes, I noticed that," agreed Uhura. "I thought it was just my imagination, but he did seem to keep looking to his left, as if he expected someone to come into the room at any moment."

Kirk regarded his senior officers thoughtfully. Between them, they'd summed up his own misgivings. He let his breath out slowly. "Any suggestions?"

"Well," began McCoy, "we must assume that the request for medical assistance is genuine. Chris will have to beam down."

Spock nodded. "Agreed. I feel, however, that it would be most unwise for her to go alone. We know nothing of these people, so I suggest that she be accompanied. In view of their... somewhat bizarre customs, it would seem prudent to send another female... armed!" he added, almost as an afterthought.

Kirk swung round to face Uhura. "I think a job for you, Lieutenant. It'll make a change from Communications, and be good experience for you. Join Miss Chapel in the transporter room, and take a phaser and communicator with you."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Uhura..."

She stopped as she was about to enter the turbolift, and looked back at him.

"Take care."

She smiled. "Yes, sir."

As the doors met behind her Kirk sat staring at them for several seconds, then straightened abruptly, transferring his attention to his First Officer.

"Spock, keep a close watch on those sensors. Anything unusual, I want to know immediately." He turned to McCoy. "I suppose all we do now is wait."

"Yeah," muttered McCoy morosely. "Wait."

* * *

On materialisation the two women found themselves in a vast hall. A double staircase wound up to a gallery high above, and elaborate crystal chandeliers lit up the place brilliantly. They exchanged glances.

"Talk about gracious living!" whispered Uhura.

Almost immediately double doors opened to their left, and Zaltar himself strode through them, flanked on either side by fully-armed guards, who dropped back and stood to attention. Uhura's hand inched, surreptitiously, towards the phaser on her belt.

"Ah, Dr. Chapel. I am gratified that you agreed to help." He inclined his head to Uhura. "Your escort, I presume?"

"Yes. Yes, that's right. It's common practice that no-one beams down to a strange planet alone. I'm sure you understand."

"Of course, of course. I understand perfectly." Zaltar looked pointedly at

Uhura's hand, resting lightly on her phaser. "I assure you, there is no need for weapons. The presence of the guard is merely protocol, Miss...?"

"Uhura... Lieutenant." Somewhat reluctantly, she withdrew her hand, keeping a wary eye on the guards nevertheless.

Zaltar inclined his head. "If you would come with me, Dr. Chapel?" He proceeded back through the double doors, followed by the two women.

To Uhura's relief the guards stayed where they were, taking up positions outside the doors. It took a good five minutes to traverse numerous richly-carpeted corridors and staircases before they eventually reached their destination and Christine accompanied Zaltar into the room.

Uhura looked about her interestedly. The palace, or whatever it was, was lavish in the extreme, yet something nagged at the back of her mind; something was wrong. She wandered down a long corridor, trying to pin down that elusive feeling, with little success. Following the curve of the corridor, her eyes took in the rich drapes cascading to the floor at intervals, and she ran her fingers over the fabric.

Then it hit her like a flash of light. Windows! Or rather, the lack of them. In the whole of their trek through the palace, there had been no view of the outside world. Surely, she reasoned, even if they had arrived in the planet's night, in all the corridors and rooms they had passed through, somewhere there should have been an undraped window. Grasping the nearest curtain she pulled it aside to reveal... heavy metal shutters, securely locked!

* * *

"Captain, something is happening on the planet."

Kirk crossed to the Vulcan's side. "Happening? What?"

"I do not know, exactly. There are vast numbers of people converging on the city. From the sensor readings they appear to be armed. Not very sophisticated weaponry. I would hazard, old-style projectile rifles."

"Projectile? But these people are highly advanced. Advanced enough to transmit messages into space requesting help from aliens. How come they have such out-dated weapons?"

"Unknown, Captain."

"Wore to the point, what the hell are they doing there?" Kirk swung to face Uhura's replacement. "Make contact with the planet again, Lieutenant. I want some answers."

He paced restlessly up and down, thinking furiously. What the hell was Zaltar playing at? He must have known about those armies when he asked him to send his own people down there. Why hadn't he said anything? Given some warning?

"Sir, there is no response."

"Damn!" Kirk crossed swiftly to the command chair and punched the button to signal Uhura. To his intense relief, the reply came promptly.

"Lieutenant Uhura here."

"Uhura, what's happening down there? Are you two okay?"

"Yes, Captain, we're fine. At least..." she hastily amended, "I'm fine. Chris is all right. She's not with me at the moment. She's with the patient. Captain, is something wrong?"

"There... could be. Sensors have detected what appears to be an army approaching the palace. Can you see anything down there?"

Things were beginning to click into place in Uhura's mind. "That explains something which has been puzzling me. It's quite impossible to see anything at

all outside the palace. All the windows have been barricaded with metal shutters, and there are armed guards down there."

Almost as she finished speaking, there was a resounding crash from below, followed by the rapid staccato of rifle fire. Kirk tensed as the sounds were transmitted over the open communicator.

"Uhura! What's happening? Are you all right?"

Keeping a wary eye on the doors, Uhura spoke hastily. "Yes, sir. I'm on an upper floor. I've no idea what's happening, but I think I'd better go and find Christine."

"All right, but for heaven's sake, be careful! I'm beaming down. Kirk out." He flipped the intercom. "Security. Three men to the transporter room immediately. Sickbay. Dr. McCoy, report to the transporter room at once!" He broke the connection. "Come on, Spock! Protocol or not, I'm going to find Zaltar and demand an explanation. Mr. Sulu, you have the con."

Entering the transporter room, they were met by an agitated Dr. McCoy. "Jim, what the hell's going on?"

Kirk grasped the doctor's arm and steered him to the platform, explaining briefly as they went. "I don't know, Bones. The palace appears to be under attack, and they're not responding to our signals."

"Under attack? What about Chris and Uhura?"

"Uhura was okay two minutes ago. She went to find Christine. I'm sure they're all right at the moment." His expression belied his words, but any comment the doctor might have made was lost as they dissolved in the sparkle of the transporter beam.

They rematerialised in the hall from which Uhura's signal had originated. Of Uhura, there was no sign. The sounds of battle from below escalated rapidly, and a door was flung open at the end of the corridor, admitting a scared and somewhat dishevelled Zaltar. He skidded to a halt at the sight of the Starfleet officers, and attempted a halting apology.

"Captain Kirk... I am sorry, I did not... I mean, I should have..."

Kirk held up a hand. "Apologies can wait. Where are my officers?"

Zaltar spread his hands helplessly. "I'm afraid... I don't know."

Kirk stared at him incredulously. "You don't know! Isn't Dr. Chapel with your wife?"

The alien stepped back a pace, his eyes darting fearfully from one to the other of the heavily-armed Security men. "Yes... yes, of course."

Kirk took a deep breath. "Then I fail to see the problem. Where is your wife?"

"They have her."

"They? And just who are They?" Kirk's voice was deceptively quiet.

"Captain, I really am sorry. I can't begin to tell you... I didn't think they were serious, thought they were bluffing."

Kirk restrained himself with an effort. "I think it's time I had an explanation, don't you?"

Zaltar hung his head. "Yes, Captain. I would have told you, but I feared you would not come if I told you the truth."

A reverberating crash shook the building and Kirk quickly considered the situation. "Is there somewhere we can discuss this in comparative safety? There's no sense in our rushing into something we know nothing about."

Zaltar moved forward with alacrity. "Yes, there is a concealed passageway leading to the cellars."

"Right, lead the way."

As they followed him, McCoy whispered urgently, "Jim, what about the girls? They could be in danger!"

"I know, Pones, I know. But there's nothing we can do till we know exactly what we're up against."

Reluctantly, the doctor had to agree.

At the end of one of the innumerable corridors Zaltar pressed a hand to the wall, and a section of the panelling slid soundlessly aside; the party passed quickly through into a lighted passage. Zaltar waited until they were all through, then grasped a lever set into the wall, and the entrance disappeared as silently as it had appeared. The Starfleet officers gazed at the seemingly solid wall, and McCoy threw a warning glance at the Vulcan.

"If you say it's fascinating, so help me, I'll brain you!"

Spock's eyebrows rose fractionally, but he refrained from comment as Zaltar started down a long flight of stone steps, followed by the others. Turning a corner, they were confronted by a solid wall of rock.

Zaltar smiled at their consternation. "A secondary safeguard, gentlemen." He placed his hand against a slightly raised nodule, and a large slab of the rock slid upwards.

The interior thus revealed was so totally unexpected that the Enterprise men just stood and gaped. They could have been in the main entrance hall of the palace; the hall was brilliantly lit by the same chandeliers; the floor was richly carpeted; and the whole place was beautifully furnished with low tables and padded couches. Three walls were lined with bookshelves, but the fourth was the focal point of the whole room. The entire wall was taken up with the winking lights of the visual monitors and control panels of an extremely advanced computer. Even Spock was visibly awed by the array of complex circuitry, and moved across for a closer examination. He reached out and let his fingers stray, almost reverently, over the master control panel.

"Captain, this is... unbelievable! This computer is far beyond the capabilities of the Federation."

Kirk dragged his gaze away from the almost hypnotic winking lights of the computer, to confront Zaltar. "Right, start talking!"

Zaltar waved a hand towards the couches. "Please, gentlemen, be seated."

Kirk stood his ground. "We haven't time for a social chat, Zaltar. Two of my officers are missing and in great danger. I want to find them - fast!"

"Patience, Captain." Zaltar smiled, all trace of his earlier agitation gone now that he was in his stronghold. "I am reasonably certain that your people are in no immediate danger. Those people out there are not savages; they are merely confused and frightened. If they do find your other officer, they will simply take her hostage with the doctor and my wife."

"I'm not sure that that sounds any better. Hostages for what? And why are they attacking the palace in the first place?"

"That is a long story, Captain, which is why I suggest we all sit down so that I can explain."

Kirk glanced at his First Officer, who nodded imperceptibly. "All right," he agreed, moving to sit down. "Start explaining."

Zaltar gave him a pained look before settling himself opposite. "To begin with, we in the palace are not of this planet. We originate from the planet Melina. The coordinates would be of no relevance to you, as we are not of this galaxy."

Spock straightened abruptly from his study of the computer. "Not of this galaxy? But, that's not possible. Inter-galactic travel takes many years."

"That is correct. Ours was a colony ship, en route to a pre-determined destination. The ship was disabled in a violent ion storm, and we had no choice but to ferry our people and equipment down to the nearest habitable planet. The native population is fairly technologically advanced. They have the beginnings of atomic power, but have not, as yet, mastered space travel."

"Rather like twentieth century Earth," mused Kirk.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sorry. Earth is our home planet. The civilisation you describe sounds very similar to the Earth of three hundred years ago."

"Ah, I see. Well, you can imagine the confusion and fear our arrival caused on Calista."

Kirk let out his breath in a low whistle. "Only too well. My ancestors from the twentieth century had no conception of alien life. For many years there were numerous reports of 'UFO' sightings, which the scientists of the day managed to explain away to the satisfaction of the general public. Of course, a great many people were far-sighted enough to acknowledge the probability that Earth was not the only planet in the galaxy able to sustain intelligent life. It was a dream of thousands one day to have positive proof that such life existed. But, as you say, I can well imagine the panic that would have ensued had a spaceship from another planet actually landed on Earth at that time."

"Such was the case here," agreed Zaltar. "We purposely landed our survival craft in an uninhabited desert area, but we were picked up on their radar, and within a very short space of time large numbers of their flying vehicles had converged on us. We submitted to their interrogation, and tried to explain as best we could that we had had no choice but to land on their world. I think we managed to convince them, eventually, that we meant them no harm, and they agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to let us stay out here in the desert, on condition that we had no contact with their people."

"No contact? Weren't they even curious about you?"

Zaltar looked searchingly at Spock, noting his appearance for the first time. "Forgive me, Mr. ..."

"Spock."

"Mr. Spock." He looked from him to the others of the Enterprise party. "You are not from the Earth of these people?"

"No. I come from the planet Vulcan."

"And you are accepted by the Earth people?"

"Sure he's accepted by us!" put in McCoy indignantly. "We've come a long way in three hundred years. Admittedly, there are still those on Earth itself who are wary of aliens, but Starfleet is composed of a number of races from all the member planets."

Zaltar sat back, thoughtfully contemplating Spock. "Perhaps your presence here, gentlemen, may help to persuade these people that it is possible to live together in harmony."

"Anything we can do, of course. But tell me, what started this present trouble? I mean, has it always been like this? How long have you been here?"

"To answer your last question first, it is now almost twenty years since we arrived here, Captain. And no, it has not always been quite like this. There has been a sort of uneasy peace between us during that time, but recently certain factions have become increasingly hostile towards us. We have received... threats... but we paid them little heed. The young of any race are apt to be a little... over-zealous. I must confess, I can see and appreciate their fears."

Were our positions reversed, I suppose that we would feel threatened by a colony of extremely advanced aliens suddenly appearing in our midst. The fact that we had little choice in the matter does not alter the present circumstances."

Kirk leaned back in his seat and studied the alien. "Well, we certainly have a problem. I can understand your reluctance to tell us the whole story before we beamed anyone down here. Fortunately, our Prime Directive doesn't apply in this instance, as you have already unwittingly broken it."

"I'm sorry? I don't understand."

Kirk smiled. "Our Prime Directive states that we must not interfere with the evolution and culture of any alien life forms we encounter on our surveys. As these people are now uncomfortably aware that other races exist, our presence can't make that much difference. We must now try to find a solution to the problem."

Zaltar sighed. "I fear you will be fighting a losing battle, Captain. We have tried everything over the years. Naturally, the people distrust us. There is no way that we can live together on this small world. Our cultures are so vastly different that there is no mutual meeting point."

"There is a simpler solution."

Kirk and Zaltar regarded the Vulcan quizzically.

"You could leave the planet."

"Do you think we haven't thought of that?" Zaltar expostulated. "Our first intent on landing was somehow to adapt our survival craft so that we could continue on our journey. There was no way we could do it. The ships are small and only intended for emergency purposes. This world simply hasn't the facilities to build the kind of ships we would need, even supposing we had their cooperation - which we certainly haven't!"

Spock waited until Zaltar's tirade subsided, then went on calmly, "How many of you are there?"

"How many? What difference does...?"

Kirk and McCoy sat up straight, suddenly aware of what the Vulcan was getting at.

"Yes, Zaltar - how many of you?"

Zaltar stared at Kirk. "One hundred and eighty two - three, if my child has been born."

Kirk rubbed his chin. "It would be a tight squeeze, but possible."

Light was beginning to daen. "You mean... your ship? But... surely you couldn't accomodate so many extra?"

"It could be done," Kirk said slowly, "but maybe it won't be necessary. I can contact Starfleet and have them send a ship to collect you - if we can persuade these people to cease hostilities for the short time it would take the ship to arrive."

"And then, what?"

"There are numerous planets in the Federation where you would be welcomed as equals. Then, it's up to you. If you still wish to continue your journey to your original destination, I'm sure the Federation will give you all the help you need."

"Captain... I... don't know what to say. It was indeed fortunate that we requested your help. How can I ever thank you?"

"Save it for now. First, we've got to get out of this mess before anyone gets hurt." He sat for a moment in thought. "I take it these people are not going to listen to reason."

"In their present state of mind, Captain, I doubt if they will listen at all. They want us out."

"Hmm. I think what we need here is a show of strength." He flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Sulu here, sir."

"Mr. Sulu, have the transporter lock onto my present position. I want a dozen Security guards beamed down at once to these coordinates. There is no immediate danger," he went on to reassure Sulu, "but we have a little problem down here, and I want some bargaining power."

"Yes, sir. I'll see to it right away, Captain." There was just a hint of apprehension in Sulu's voice.

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. Kirk out." He turned to Zaltar. "I assume you do have weapons?"

"Alas, only a very small supply, enough to equip maybe twenty men. We are a peaceful people, and normally abhor the use of violence. Our ship was, of necessity, armed, purely for self-defence, but we carried only a small emergency supply of hand weapons."

Kirk smiled. "We too employ physical force only as a last resort, and even then our weapons are invariably used only to render the victim unconscious."

Zaltar breathed a sigh of relief. "In that case, Captain, I will gladly help. I did have ten guards posted around the building, largely to give my people a feeling of security, but we did not envisage circumstances getting out of hand quite so suddenly."

His attention was caught by a sparkling in the centre of the room, which gradually resolved itself into the forms of the first group of Security men. He nodded interestedly. "Your method of matter transference is... quite fascinating."

McCoy groaned. "Oh lord, not another one!" He looked up to find Zaltar's puzzled gaze resting on him, and grinned sheepishly. "Sorry, I meant no disrespect, sir. It's just that that particular word - fascinating - is a favourite of Mr. Spock's."

Zaltar smiled back a little uncertainly, not quite sure what the doctor meant to convey, and Kirk adroitly turned the attention from his friends.

"Are your people familiar with the process?"

"Of course, Captain. The process of dematerialisation and reconstruction of matter has been known to us for generations. I commented on your method simply because ours has no... side effects. We just appear and disappear, instantaneously."

"Yes, well..." Kirk changed the subject, feeling a little foolish. "I suggest we get ourselves organised and try to put a stop to this unrest."

Emerging stealthily from the concealed passageway, weapons at the ready, the Enterprise men and Zaltar's people moved warily into the corridor and Kirk gave a sigh of relief at the notable absence of rifle fire. Moving forward cautiously, they fanned out along the corridor. Sounds of far-off voices filtered through the passageways, and turning a corner they were confronted by a small group of soldiers who stared at them in astonishment. That second of indecision was enough, and the soldiers succumbed to phaser stuns before they could even raise their guns. A second group was despatched in the same way before Kirk's party reached a staircase. Motioning several of the guards to stay below, Kirk led the way slowly up the stairs.

As they rounded the top a startled guard automatically raised his weapon, and as quickly lowered it as he gazed at the heavily-armed strangers. Slowly,

he lowered his rifle to the floor and stood bravely facing the aliens. His composure wavered somewhat as his eyes fell on the man who silently joined the leader. He had only seen pictures of the aliens who were living on his planet, and the stranger had the same pointed ears, but he knew with awful certainty that this man was not of the same race. A thrill of fear ran through him as he locked gazes with the stranger; eyes like pools of black ice, utterly devoid of feeling -- they seemed to look right into his soul and mind, and he instinctively backed away.

Noting his consternation, Kirk smiled reassuringly. "Don't be afraid. We intend you no harm." He restrained the sudden, irrational impulse to demand, "Take me to your leader!", saying simply, "Where are you holding the Melinans?"

Dragging his attention from those oddly compelling, cold, black eyes, the soldier faced the other man. "What do you want of us?"

"Of you? Nothing. I simply want to know where the Melinans are, together with my two officers."

"Why... Why should I tell you?"

Kirk sighed. "Look, Mr.... What is your name?"

"Slavik. Lieutenant Slavik."

"Lieutenant Slavik. I intend to find those people, with or without your cooperation. Do I make myself clear?"

The man swallowed and stood to attention. "Yes, sir."

Kirk regarded the young man sympathetically, mentally commending his composure in the face of such a potentially traumatic situation. Bringing all his diplomacy to the fore, he attempted to set the man's mind at rest.

"Lieutenant, please believe me, you have nothing to fear, either from the Melinans or from us. This situation can be very simply resolved with a little cooperation. Now, will you take us to your l..." he hastily caught himself, and rephrased the request, "... the man in charge of this operation?"

Slavik again swept his gaze over the armed men in front of him, recognising the futility of refusal, and silently turned to lead the way. They followed him along several corridors, finally halting at the foot of yet another staircase.

"They took everyone they could find up to the second floor," he informed Kirk quietly.

Kirk looked up the stairs. Footsteps could clearly be heard, together with the hum of conversation. Motioning the others to follow, he started up. Just short of the top he held up a hand and looked back, whispering.

"We'd better be prepared for anything. They've probably got more guards on watch, so when I give the signal, move forward at once. Phasers on stun. Right ... forward!"

With a concerted leap the party cleared the staircase and swarmed across the stretch of hallway. Two more guards stationed outside the immense double doors crumpled under phaser stuns. Motioning men to either side of the doors, Kirk and Spock, phasers at the ready, moved as one man to fling open the doors.

The suddenness of their arrival gave them the element of surprise, and although the soldiers automatically raised their guns, one look at the veritable army of aliens with their strange weapons was enough to make them conceded defeat. At a signal from a tall man who was obviously the commander, the soldiers lowered their weapons slowly to the floor, and raised their arms above their heads.

Kirk looked round the room, taking in the incredible scene before him. The Melinans lounged in small groups scattered round the room, engaged in idle conversation, seemingly oblivious of the fact that they were prisoners.

He glanced across at his First Officer, and was amused to perceive Spock's eyebrows almost vanishing into his hair in disbelief. Firmly repressing the urge to smile, he turned his attention back to the soldiers. Without shifting his gaze, he gave instructions to his men.

"Andrews, Johnson, collect all those guns. Zaltar, post a couple of your men outside, just in case."

As they moved to comply a familiar voice suddenly exploded. "What the hell! What's the matter with these people? Don't they realise they've just been rescued?"

The righteous indignation in McCoy's voice was too much for Kirk, and his lips curved, against his will, into a broad grin. "You know, Bones, I'm not even sure they acknowledged that they were prisoners."

Zaltar stepped forward. "That is, in a sense, true, Captain. As I informed you earlier, my people abhor violence. When the Calistans stormed the building they took the only course of action open to them and offered no resistance. In effect my people, once captured and brought here, gave themselves up to the inevitable and accepted it philosophically. The Calistans are not a hostile race, they are merely afraid."

Kirk nodded thoughtfully, letting his gaze sweep over the Calistan soldiers, who had been following the exchange with interest, coming to rest on the tall man who had given the signal to capitulate earlier.

"I take it you, sir, are in charge here?"

The man took a step forward, still holding his arms above his head. "Major Richtvar. I headed this operation."

"Major Richtvar, I am Captain James Kirk of the USS Enterprise." He made an impatient gesture with his hand. "For heaven's sake, lower your arms... all of you! Let's be civilised about this. Major Richtvar, tell me, what did you hope to gain by this... invasion? Was it your intention to kill these people?"

"Kill them? Good Lord, no! We are not murderers!"

"Then what?"

"I... We thought... We decided we needed to know exactly what these aliens were. They've been here for years now, shut away in this city."

"But surely, that was at your own request? They were ordered to remain apart from your people."

"Yes... Well... That was a long time ago. It was not our decision. Our people were getting restless, all the time wondering what they were up to, why they were really here."

A calm, even voice asked, "Wouldn't it have been simpler just to have asked?"

Richtvar turned to look at the dark haired, pointed eared alien who had spoken, and swallowed nervously. "What... Who are you?"

"You could have been right the first time, Major. I've been trying for years to figure out exactly what he is."

Kirk glared at a grinning McCoy. "Bones, please, this is no time for your doubtful sense of humour."

The inane remark had, however, made its impact on the Calistan, and he looked carefully from McCoy to Kirk to Spock.

"He is obviously not one of you, yet you joke about him as if he were... a friend."

"Which he is," put in Kirk with a grateful, understanding smile at the doctor. "Allow me to introduce Mr. Spock, my First Officer, and Dr. McCoy, my Chief Medical Officer. It is true that Mr. Spock is not from the same planet as

the others of us here. The United Federation of Planets, which we represent, is composed of a large number of civilisations, some of whose people are far more alien than Mr. Spock here."

"Federation of Planets?" There was a distinct trace of fear in the man's voice.

The Vulcan inclined his head. "Surely, Major, the possibility of alien life must have occurred to you. You are an intelligent people. It must be obvious to you that yours is not the only planet in the universe. The presence of the Melinans would seem to be positive proof."

Richtvar took a calming breath. "Yes, of course, we are aware that this planet is only one of... millions, and naturally, we conceded the probability of life on some of those planets. But accepting the possibility and being faced with the reality are... vastly different."

"Yes, I can understand that," Kirk agreed quietly. "As I pointed out to Zaltar earlier, a similar state of affairs existed on my world centuries ago. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that, so often, people tend to react to fear of the unknown with violence. We come across it so often, and in the majority of circumstances all that is required is... friendly cooperation. There is no reason why we can't all live in harmony... accept each other for what we are, without fear. The Vulcans," he indicated Spock, "have a concept which we would all do well to emulate, the concept of IDIC -- Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations. Certainly there will at times be friction -- but friction exists between members of the same race! Some races are more intelligent, more technologically advanced, but that should not be a reason for hostility. We can all help each other in some way."

Richtvar looked thoughtfully from Kirk to Spock. "That sounds fine in theory -- but does it work in practice?"

Kirk grinned. "Not always. There are, of course, some races who are openly hostile -- the Klingons, for example -- but by and large we all get along reasonably well."

"This... Federation... is it then a sort of... central government?"

"By no means. Each individual member planet has its own system of rules and government. The Federation acts as... a coordinator, establishing communication between worlds, trade agreements, discussing matters of mutual concern... in a word, helping."

The bemused man rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Forgive me, Captain, but this is all too much to take in at once."

"I quite understand. Under normal circumstances, we would not have approached you at this time. The usual procedure on finding an inhabited world is to watch from a distance, without interference, until such time as we think the people are ready to be contacted. It was unfortunate that the Melinans were forced to land on your world, and so precipitate this confrontation, but there is little point in regret or recrimination now. What's done is done. We must now find some solution to the problem... if, indeed, you still feel there is a problem." Kirk looked at Richtvar enquiringly.

The Calistan returned the look for a long moment, then his gaze slid to Zaltar, and on to encompass the other Melinans, who were now watching him expectantly. He cleared his throat self-consciously.

"I... er... concede your argument, Captain." He ran a hand through his hair distractedly. "I... am ashamed... mortified, by my people's intolerance. I can only plead ignorance... and fear, and beg forgiveness."

Zaltar approached him, hand extended. "Let there be no recriminations on either side. Now, thanks to Captain Kirk and his officers, we have been given the opportunity to begin again. He has, on behalf of the Federation which he represents, offered us transportation from Calista. May we call a truce until

such time as this can be arranged?"

Richtvar eyed the proffered hand, hesitating momentarily, then reached forward to grasp it in his own. "I think I can speak on behalf of my people, sir. We never intended you any harm, and I'm sure, once the true facts have been conveyed to them, the Calistans will be quite willing for you to remain here, should you so desire." He smiled a little shyly. "I'm sure we could learn a great deal from you, sir."

Zaltar nodded slowly. "Thank you, Major. I will certainly give serious consideration to your proposal... but it must be a mutual decision of both peoples, after the Calistans and the Melinans have had a chance to assess each other."

The Calistan let out his breath in a sigh of relief. "Of course, sir. I will speak to my government and arrange meetings between our two peoples."

Kirk grinned at them both. "Well, I'm glad to see you've come to your senses. There's just one thing remaining now. Where are my officers and Zaltar's wife?"

Richtvar smiled openly for the first time. "They are quite safe. I thought it best to keep them separate, in view of the lady's condition."

"Please, will you take us to them?" A note of anxiety had crept into Zaltar's voice. Now that the main issues had been resolved satisfactorily, he could allow his personal feelings to surface, and his very real concern for his wife was mirrored in his violet eyes.

"Of course." Richtvar turned aside and crossed to a door at the far side of the room, closely followed by Zaltar, Spock, Kirk and McCoy. He tapped lightly on the closed door, and a head poked round the edge. A wide grin split the dark face at the sight of the Enterprise men, and Uhura raised a finger to her lips.

"Shh," she whispered as she stepped aside to allow the men entrance.

They stopped just inside the door, taking in the scene before them. The young Melinan woman - little more than a girl - lay sleeping, a sleep of utter exhaustion, as was evident by the deep lines of strain etched round her eyes and mouth. Christine Chapel, looking almost as exhausted, sat in a chair at the foot of the bed, a tiny bundle cradled tenderly in her arms.

She looked up at Zaltar's approach, and smiled tiredly. "You have a son. He's fine... and so is your wife."

Zaltar dropped to his knees and reached a trembling hand to touch the infant's face. "My son," he whispered, almost in awe. "Doctor... I thank you." He looked long at the sleeping child, then his eyes strayed to the bed. "My wife... she is..."

"She's fine, Zaltar... just tired. She had a long and difficult labour, but she's young and strong. All she needs is rest."

Kirk leaned in the doorway, his eyes sweeping the room. With a distinct twinkle in his eye he remarked casually, "Where is she?"

Zaltar raised his head to regard Kirk quizzically. "Where is who?"

"Mother."

"Mother? I don't... Oh yes, I see." A smile touched Zaltar's lips. "I apologise for the little subterfuge, Captain. As you can see, my wife is very young..." He broke off, his eyes resting on the sleeping girl. "Perhaps too young," he almost whispered. "She begged me to try to find a woman doctor. The fabrication seemed the easiest way, although in the event of you not having a female doctor aboard, I would of course have capitulated."

Kirk smiled back warmly. "I understand. Actually, that was one of the things that made us wary in the first place. In a highly advanced society such

as yours, the idea of such a taboo seemed extremely out of place. It wasn't necessary, you know. You could have told us the truth."

"Yes, I realise that now," Zaltar looked round the room. "It seems we have all learned something today. Thank you, Captain." He got to his feet, and the other men stepped forward to look at the child.

McCoy grinned wickedly. "Getting into practice, Chris?" He leaned closer, peering at the baby. "And he's got pointed ears, too!"

Christine glared up at him, and almost in unison she and Spock declared, "Really, Doctor!"

The doctor looked from one to the other innocently. "What did I say? Did I mention any names? Did I? All I said was..."

"I know what you said, Doctor," ground out Christine, trying desperately to avoid the Vulcan's eye. To her horror she felt her face and neck begin to glow hotly. She rose swiftly to her feet and passed the baby to Uhura, almost running from the room.

Spock watched her go, then turned an icy stare on McCoy. "As usual, Doctor, you can be relied upon to turn the simplest situation into an embarrassing predicament." With a nod of apology to the others, he strode from the room.

McCoy stared after him in astonishment. "Well, well, well," he murmured softly.

"Bones," warned Kirk, "don't start reading anything into that. You've done enough damage already."

"Me? Damage?"

At the expression of outraged innocence on his friend's face, Kirk broke up. "Yes, you, my friend. You just can't resist a dig at Spock, can you? But you might have thought of Chris. Spock can ignore you quite efficiently, but..."

McCoy was contrite. "Yeah, Jim, I know. Me and my big mouth. I'll apologise to her, I promise. You know I wouldn't hurt her - either of them - for the world."

Kirk smiled and laid his hand on the doctor's shoulder. "I know, Bones." He turned to the curious Zaltar and Richtvar, shrugging helplessly. "You see what I mean. Even the most stable of relationships can sometimes be subject to friction. This is just one example of the continuing... verbal feud between my First Officer and my Chief Medical Officer. Neither of them mean anything by it... though to outward appearances they seem to dislike each other intensely."

The other two men exchanged glances. "You mean, they don't?"

McCoy laughed aloud. "Appearances can be deceptive. That's one of the basic tenets of civilisation. Spock and I... agree to differ."

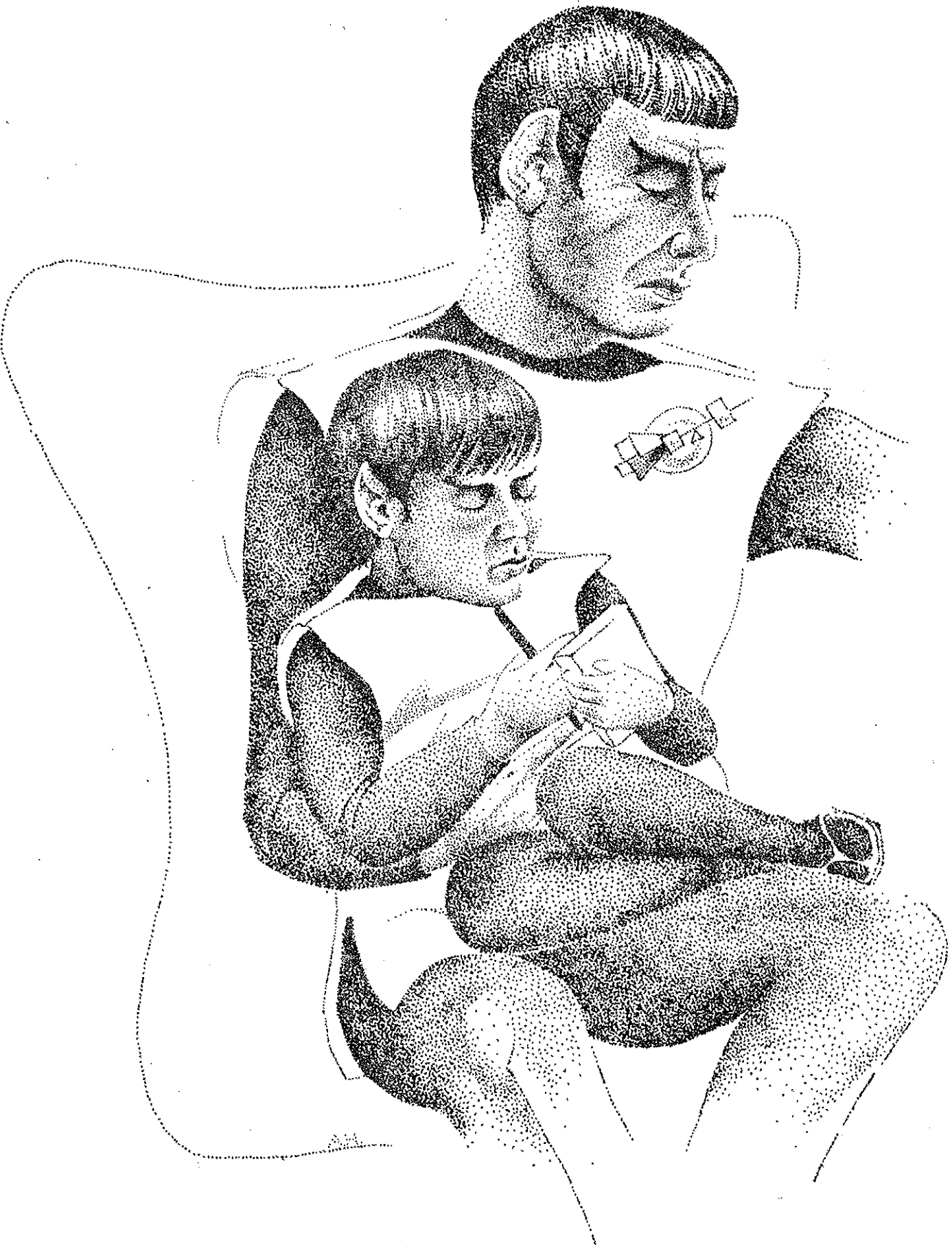
Kirk took his arm. "Come on, gentlemen, Uhura. I think Zaltar would appreciate some time alone with his wife - and then we've all got some serious talking to do."

Zaltar smiled gratefully as they exited. Kirk's gaze swept over the occupants of the large hall, and he raised an eyebrow in a perfect imitation of his First Officer. "Somehow, I don't think you're going to have too much trouble in coming to terms," he observed, smiling.

Certainly, if the sight that met their eyes was anything to go by, his observation was accurate. All trace of hostility had vanished like melting snow. Scattered round the room in groups of varying sizes, Melinans, Calistans and the Enterprise people were engaged in animated discussion, the occasional ripple of laughter punctuating the hum of conversation.

The Major nodded. "For which we have you to thank, Captain Kirk."

The Captain shrugged, his face wreathed in smiles. "All in a day's work, Major. All in a day's work."



LITTLE BOY LOST

Amanda was able to get on with her household task. Smiling, she looked out of the window and into the back garden where two-year-old Spock sat playing with I-Chaya the sehlat. Spock was a very curious child, always following Amanda around the house, asking endless questions. To get some peace for a while she put him out into the garden. Everything would be all right so long as I-Chaya was there; the sehlat guarded young Spock, and had assumed the role of protector and playmate to his little friend, following him like a giant shadow. Amanda had even seen him turn Spock away from the gateway.

Amanda's thoughts were busy. Spock's Vulcan training had begun over a year ago now, and she tried hard not to interfere with Sarek's teachings. At times it seemed harsh and cruel to Amanda, but then Spock was more advanced than other Vulcan children of his age. He could speak clearly and fluently in both Vulcan and English, and the signs of independence were beginning to appear as well. Spock tried to do things for himself without Amanda's assistance -- sometimes he did not succeed, but he always wanted to try.

Amanda looked up from the preparation of the evening meal. The wall chronometer read 1625 -- soon Sarek would be home. Wiping her hands, she went to the doorway and called to Spock. He obeyed immediately, leaving the sehlat.

"Dinner will be ready soon, and Sarek will be home." Amanda looked at her young son. "What do you have to do before he arrives?" she questioned.

Spock looked down and held out his hands.

"That's right. Sarek would not like to see you with a dirty face either!"

She led the way upstairs. Spock was too small to reach the washbasin, so she stood him on a chair. She watched in amusement as he awkwardly washed his face and hands, refusing all assistance. More water splashed on the floor than anywhere else...

"Very good," Amanda praised, lifting him down from the chair.

They returned to the kitchen, where Spock sat at the table, solemnly watching everything she was doing. "What's that for?" he asked as she shredded cheese.

"I'm making a cheese pie. You like that, don't you?"

"Yes." He considered the idea for a moment. "I can't hear Sarek's car."

"It is too early yet." Amanda talked as she worked. She believed in carrying on a conversation with Spock, even doing it when he was only days old. Maybe that was why he was so fluent now.

"No!" she reprimanded as his hand reached out to take a piece from one of the prepared dishes. "You do not touch it."

"The car..." He scrambled down from the chair with some difficulty to look out of the window at the arriving aircar.

Sarek stepped from the vehicle and strode towards the house, noticing the little face pressed against the window. "Greetings." He touched hands with Amanda and then turned to Spock. "What have you been doing today?"

Spock gazed up at his father and tried to give the Vulcan hand salute, not succeeding very well. He held up his arms, obviously wanting Sarek to lift him. Sarek did so, and Spock stared at him for a moment, his expression changing. Sarek frowned in disapproval as his son began to smile.

"You must not do that. It is illogical," he said sternly. The smile vanished instantly. "You have much to learn," he added, setting Spock down again. "Come."

Spock had his own special place at the table, managing to handle a fork or

spoon quite well, although sometimes the food did not go directly where it should. Amanda didn't mind when he dropped it.

In the evenings Sarek usually worked in his study, going over official documents and other diplomatic papers. Sometimes Spock would come in and try to see what his father was doing. He would somehow climb up on to the chair and from there to Sarek's knee. Sarek permitted this as Spock knew not to touch anything on the desk. He chattered away to his father in Vulcan and English, switching from one to the other until Amanda entered to do the necessary and inform him it was definitely bed-time.

Sarek was left to work in peace as Amanda escorted Spock from the study and upstairs to the bathroom, following the nightly routine. This was one place he was not allowed to try and fend for himself - there were too many taps and fittings, some giving out scalding water, far too dangerous for little hands to tamper with.

"Right, in you go," Amanda said, lifting Spock into the warm water. "Hey! Stop that!" she laughed as he splashed her. "You are here to get clean, not to soak me."

As usual the floor was soaking wet by the time they had finished; Amanda always turned bath time into a sort of game. "Hold still," she ordered, towelling Spock's hair dry. "Look at this place - it's like a swimming pool..." She dressed him in night attire; Vulcans wore a cotton robe for coolness. "Come on, you can go downstairs for a while until your hair is properly dry."

Sarek had finished working, his papers put away. "I thought it was your bed time," he said, looking up as they entered.

Spock climbed up on to the chair to sit beside his father.

"Your hair is wet." Sarek touched the sleek dark hair.

"Yes, I was in the bath." Spock looked at the cup Sarek held. "What's that? Can I have some "

"You do not like tea," Sarek answered, holding the cup out of his reach. "It will burn you," he warned as Spock tried to touch it.

Spock drew back at his father's warning tone, then the dark eyes turned on Amanda. "Can I have some fruit juice, please?"

"Only a little one." Amanda returned with a very small glass of his favourite kind. "That is all now; as soon as you have finished it you are going to bed." A few minutes later she took the glass from him. "You are tired. Say goodnight."

" 'Night, Father."

Sarek replied in Vulcan and received the proper response in return, his eyes following Amanda as she ushered Spock from the room.

Amanda tucked the covers around her son, sitting down on the edge of the bed for a few minutes as usual before turning out the light. "Are you sleepy now?" She leaned over and kissed his forehead. "Goodnight, sleep well. Don't forget to call if you want me." She adjusted the cover one last time and extinguished the light before moving softly from the room, leaving the door open slightly.

* * *

Next morning Sarek had already left for the Embassy when she woke Spock. After breakfast he wanted to go into the garden, while Amanda busied herself in the house. Some time later, when she stopped and looked out the window, there was no sign of Spock, and I-Chaya had disappeared too.

Frantically, Amanda searched the garden, without success. She ran into the house in case he had come in while she was working. Amanda had told him, over and over again, impressing on his young mind that she wanted to know his every

intention. Spock always obeyed this instruction, and Amanda would turn at the small voice, or a hand tugging at her dress for attention.

Not this time...

She searched the whole house, running from room to room, calling his name. Only silence was here; the house was completely empty.

In a panic now, Amanda called Sarek at the Embassy. Knowing it had to be important for her to contact him here, he listened carefully to her frantic message, only an upraised eyebrow giving any indication of his reaction.

"I will return home immediately and we will conduct a search. I will also inform the authorities."

"Oh, hurry, Sarek... please!"

Sarek arrived in the aircar with three of his colleagues following. Aircars began searching the immediate area while Amanda sat at home, sick with worry. Sarek had forbidden her to go with him...

* * *

Meanwhile, Spock was walking further out into the Sas-a-Shar desert. While in the garden he had made friends with a Re-sheel, a little rabbit-like creature. When it ran off he followed, somehow getting out of the enclosed grounds. The creature led him to the edge of the desert, about two miles from home.

Here in the wild, barren area the sun blazed down even more fiercely, the heat shimmer distorting the surroundings. Spock began to feel thirsty, and tried to turn back. One rock and clump of sparse vegetation looked the same as another to his young mind - he was well and truly lost.

The sun was merciless, a searing ball of fire. Spock walked until he could go no further, then sat down in the hot dry sand. The area was devoid of any shade, and the fierce sun beat down on his unprotected head and shoulders. Spock realised he was lost. The urge to cry welled up inside him, but the Vulcan half fought against allowing the emotion to come through, and the feeling slowly died away.

The thirst got worse and worse. Spock felt strangely light-headed and sick as his little body began to dehydrate in the furnace-like heat. He lay down, and descended into unconsciousness...

* * *

The faithful I-Chaya followed the trail, nose to the ground, taking the same path Spock had travelled some time before. He broke into a run as the scent grew stronger, stopping beside the little Vulcan. He whined and pawed at the still form, gently nudging Spock with his nose.

Realising there was no response, I-Chaya lay down beside his little friend, his huge body casting dark and welcome shade over the still form. From time to time he anxiously whined and licked Spock's face, hoping for some response. The eyes stayed closed.

I-Chaya lifted his head at the sound of approaching engines. An aircar flew low, scanning the area. Sarek saw the sehlat below, but did not pay much attention at first as Vulcan's Forge was the sehlat's natural habitat. He swung the aircar around as the animal stood on its hind legs and roared.

"That is I-Chaya!" Sarek recognised the gesture the sehlat always performed to attract attention.

The aircar landed a short distance from where I-Chaya still stood on guard over Spock. "Good boy, I-Chaya." Sarek patted the huge furry head, then gathered Spock into his arms. He knew his son was suffering from heat exhaustion, as his natural immunity still had to develop fully. Spock's face was flushed, his skin burning hot to the touch.

The aircar sped towards Shi-Kahr, the journey taking only a few minutes. Amanda ran out of the house as the car touched down, and Sarek jumped out, the still figure in his arms.

"Get ice, quickly!" he commanded, setting Spock down on the bed. Amanda flew to do his bidding. Sarek removed Spock's clothing and soaked a sheet in cold water, wrapping it round his body and packing the ice she brought around his son.

"We have to bring his temperature down. Stay with him, Amanda. I will call the doctor."

After a while Spock opened his eyes and tried to throw off the ice-cold, wet sheet, but Sarek restrained him. Then Spock realised he was home with his parents instead of out in the burning desert. His expression changed, and he began to cry, holding his arms out towards Amanda. She hugged him against her, regardless of the soaking wet sheet.

"Ssh... it is all right. You are safe now..." She stroked his hair until the attack of weeping began to abate.

Sarek never said a word, or looked disapproving at the emotional outburst; he seemed only too glad to have Spock home again, safe and sound.

Amanda was wiping Spock's tearstained face when the doctor arrived. He stripped off the sheet to feel his little patient's body temperature.

"You acted quickly and correctly." He replaced the sheet. "A case of heat stroke, quite common in the young when the system is not fully developed. His temperature is almost normal now. I advise plenty of liquids; he is severely dehydrated." With that the doctor left, giving the hand salute to Sarek.

"Mother..." came the small voice from the bed. "I am cold."

Sarek placed his hand on Spock's forehead, and found it cool. He removed the sheet and packing of ice, then Amanda took over, drying and dressing their son.

"Thank heavens your skin can't burn. That would have been a lot worse." She tidied up, getting rid of the sheet and the remains of the ice.

That finished, she went through to the other room where Spock lay on the couch, three empty glasses beside him. Sarek had made him drink a lot of liquid, which he was reluctant to do.

Sarek stood up. "Spock," he began, his face stern, "you must never do anything like that again, do you understand?"

"Yes..."

"It is illogical to endanger your own life. Many wild creatures roam Vulcan's forge. You will not leave the enclosed grounds again. You are too young to go out on your own without supervision."

"... not do it again..." Spock's eyes were downcast.

"You are forgiven," Sarek acknowledged gravely.

The incident was closed. Sarek knew it would never be repeated, but it gave Amanda nightmares for weeks to come. How close it had been to ending in tragedy...



VULCAN DIPLOMACY

Amanda felt so helpless as she lay in bed. Foolishly, she had stayed out too long in the fierce Vulcan sun without a head covering, and had contracted sunstroke. The doctor advised complete rest. Suval and T'Pau, Sarek's parents, were visiting in Shi-Lak, the distance between the cities too great for Spock to go and stay with them until Amanda's recovery.

"I will take him to the Embassy with me." Sarek solved the problem.

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly." Sarek touched Amanda's hand. "Dr. Stal ordered complete rest. You cannot obey his orders and look after Spock at the same time."

So, the following morning Sarek and two-year-old Spock departed for the Embassy. The house seemed very silent and strange to Amanda at first, but she was grateful for the rest, and read for a while before descending into a most welcome sleep.

Spock was very good that first morning. Sarek had given him some books to keep him occupied. He could not read yet, but some of the books were illustrated, and he sat on the floor looking at the pictures. Several of the Embassy staff were surprised to see the little face peeping from behind Sarek's desk.

"Hello. My name is Spock. What's yours?" he asked one of Sarek's colleagues.

"Greetings, Spock. I am called Sonak," the Vulcan replied gravely, raising one eyebrow at Sarek.

Then Spock wanted to know what Sarek was doing, and climbed up on to a chair to look at the paperwork on the desk.

"Do not touch anything," Sarek warned.

He did not get much chance to work, as Spock asked question after question, wanting to know what this was for and why he did that. When Sarek left the room for a moment he climbed up and sat in his chair behind the official desk.

That afternoon there was to be an important meeting with several ambassadors from the Federation planets. The Andorian Ambassador chose that moment to arrive. He stopped in astonishment as he saw the Vulcan child behind the desk - Spock was standing on the chair. He looked at the ambassador for a moment, then gave the Vulcan hand sign.

"And who are you?" the Ambassador smiled.

"I'm Spock. Have you come to discuss things with my father?"

"Yes, I have. Will you tell him that Ambassador Tav is here?"

"That will not be necessary." Sarek walked into the office. "Welcome, Ambassador. I regret I was unable to greet you in person on your arrival."

"No matter. I think your son will grow up to be an ambassador himself," the Andorian smiled. "He greeted me like an adult Vulcan. How old is he?"

"He is in his second year," Sarek replied, explaining the reason for Spock's presence.

Spock sat on the floor, quietly listening as Sarek received several other ambassadors. They all commented on how quiet and good he was, a complete contrast to their own children.

They were even more impressed at lunchtime, when Spock sat at the table with them, the only difference being that Sarek provided him with a spoon instead of anything sharp which could possibly be dangerous. The boy ate in silence, only speaking to ask Sarek if he could have some more fruit juice. The ambassadors had never seen anything like this before; their own children were

very unsteady and messy, getting more food on the tablecloth and on the face than where it was supposed to go.

"You are a credit to Vulcan, little Spock," the Tellarite remarked.

They moved to another room and continued the discussion. Sarek noticed that Spock's eyes were becoming cloudy, and directed him to one of the lounge chairs. They talked on. Sarek was answering a question when one of the ambassadors interrupted.

"Forgive me, Ambassador Sarek, but your son has been staring into that corner for the past ten minutes."

"He is asleep," Sarek replied. "There is no cause for concern. A Vulcan sleeps with his eyes open."

"Every one of us differs in some respect," someone else remarked.

Spock slept on until the delegates were ready to leave for the conference. One touch from Sarek brought him to instant awareness, his eyes bright and clear once more.

"Come. We must leave now." Sarek led him towards the vast conference hall.

Again, the ambassadors were amazed as the little Vulcan sat quietly beside his father. Several ambassadors spoke, then it was Sarek's turn to address the assembly.

"You will remain here," he instructed Spock.

"Yes, father."

All eyes were on the tall, dignified Vulcan as he took his place on the raised platform. The opinions of Sarek's government were the most important on the issue which they debated. Silence fell as he began to speak.

Spock listened to his father's voice, not understanding the subject he was debating. He disliked having to sit still for so long, and examined the features of the ambassadors around him. The books no longer held his interest. Sarek spoke on...

After a while, Spock jumped and almost cried out as he felt a sharp pain in his abdominal area. The ambassador next to him looked at him for a moment, then turned his attention back to Sarek.

Spock did not know what to do. He knew he would get lost in this vast building, and the pain would not go away. He also rebelled against asking for assistance; the ambassadors were all alien, and the other Vulcans present were strangers to him. He did not realise he was moving around so much until the Ambassador sitting next to him lifted him back onto the chair with the words, "Be still, little one. Your father is still speaking."

Spock felt as if he wanted to cry. He was still a child, a very young one, totally lost among all these adults. He sat there, miserably waiting for Sarek to finish addressing the assembly. The minutes crawled by...

The Rigellian Ambassador spoke to him again, gently reprimanding him, not realising that the Vulcan child required attention, just like any other.

Sarek had always taught Spock to be logical, so he scrambled down from the chair once more. "No!" He pushed the ambassador's arm away.

Most of the delegates watched with amusement as the diminutive figure approached the raised dais and ascended the stairs. Sarek had not noticed, and carried on speaking.

By now the audience's attention was focused on the little Vulcan as he walked towards his father. A ripple of laughter echoed round the vast conference hall as Spock tugged at Sarek's tunic.

"Father..."

Sarek ignored him and carried on speaking.

"Father... please..." Spock tried to draw Sarek's attention.

"Cease your illogical actions!" Sarek reprimanded, freeing his sleeve from Spock's grasp.

Every non-Vulcan in the conference hall erupted into laughter as Spock's request was picked up by the sound-speakers and transmitted around the building.

Sarek's face flushed a deeper shade of green as he stopped in mid-sentence, unable to ignore his son any longer. "My apologies for the interruption," he began. "I... must announce a recess..."

"He is only a child," someone called.

"We have children of our own," another voice added.

Sarek nodded and stepped down from the platform, ushering Spock from the conference hall. He led him away from the immediate area, not wishing for any of the ambassadors to be around. Sarek had his own private apartments in the Embassy, and this was where he was taking Spock.

Spock knew by his father's manner that he was extremely displeased.

"You must never do that again!" Sarek's voice was stern as he ushered his son through to the inner quarters of the apartment. "You embarrassed me before the Federation ambassadors."

"Father... I..." Spock clutched at Sarek's tunic as his senses reeled, trying to fight off the enveloping darkness.

"Spock!" He heard Sarek's voice coming from a long long way off... He opened his eyes to find himself stretched out on the floor, with Sarek bathing his face with something wet and cold.

"Drink." Sarek held the cup to his lips. "How long did you conceal these feelings?"

"... don't know. You were speaking..."

"Your actions were not logical, Spock. There were Vulcans present. You should have asked for assistance."

"But... I do not know any of them, Father."

Sarek nodded understandingly, helping Spock to his feet.

"Father... don't leave!" Spock exclaimed as Sarek turned. "I could not find my way back there..."

"That was not my intention." Sarek raised one eyebrow. "I must remain. You fainted, and that is not normal in a Vulcan."

Sarek did not speak again. His thoughts were concentrated on the outcome of the debate. Some of the ambassadors were against the issue. He thought over what he had already said, and what he still had to say. A loud, urgent buzz reached his ears, making him look up.

"I must answer," he said to Spock.

Sonak stood in the outer apartment. "Forgive me, Sarek. The delegates await your presence."

"I know." Sarek glanced at his wrist chronometer. "There has been an unforeseen complication. My son lost consciousness for a few minutes. I do not consider it safe to leave him."

"I will remain," Sonak volunteered.

"Spock does not know you. However, it is only logical," Sarek agreed.

Spock looked away as he saw the other Vulcan enter with his father.

"Spock, I must return to the conference hall. Sonak will remain, and will

escort you back there."

"Yes, Father." Spock's eyes were downcast.

"Is this the first time you have visited the Embassy?" Sonak asked when Sarek departed.

... Silence...

"Do you feel ill? Can I help you?" he asked concernedly, seeing the tips of the tiny ears beginning to turn bright green.

Still Spock would not speak or even look at him, his gaze centered on the floor. Sonak raised one eyebrow and fell silent himself. He leafed through the sheaf of diplomatic papers he carried with him, beginning to wish that he had not been so quick to offer his services. The thought was illogical; he dismissed it - and the diplomatic papers - when he realised Spock was speaking to him.

"Take me back."

"Affirmative. We shall return." Sonak almost breathed a sigh of relief.

"No! Do not touch me!" Spock refused the adult Vulcan's assistance.

//Sarek has trained you well,// Sonak thought as he led Spock through the Embassy corridors.

Sarek's voice was drowned out as the ambassadors clapped as the little Vulcan entered the conference hall, the noise holding up the debate.

"... best laugh I have had in years!" one delegate said to his neighbour.

"I never thought I would get a laugh among these stiff-necked..."

"You know how Vulcans are very outspoken. The little one is only a child," someone else remarked.

Sarek had to wait till the noise died down before speaking again. Spock listened to his father's voice for a while, then his eyes began to cloud over and his gaze became fixed. He heard no more...

"Time to go home, Spock." Sarek touched his shoulder. His senses cleared to find the conference hall completely empty. He had slept through the rest of the debate, and the departure of the ambassadors.

Amanda looked a lot better when they arrived home. She smiled apprehensively at Sarek's upraised eyebrows when she asked about Spock's day at the Embassy.

Sarek looked at his son for a moment, then sent him out of the room before telling Amanda of the day's events.

Amanda laughed until the tears ran down her face. "That has done me more good than any amount of rest," she giggled, wiping her eyes.

"Indeed?" Sarek raised one eyebrow at the illogic of the statement.

"I am feeling much better, and will be able to get up tomorrow," Amanda informed him.

The look of relief on Sarek's face had to be seen to be believed. "Then... I will not have to take Spock to the Embassy with me?" he asked.

"That's right," Amanda laughed.

For days afterwards Amanda would break into a fit of the giggles every time the thought came into her mind of Spock standing on the platform tugging at Sarek's sleeve in front of all the ambassadors. More than once, she was in the company of Vulcans when the urge to laugh overwhelmed her, and she had to leave. On one occasion she giggled all the way home, oblivious of the stares of passers-by.

Then Sarek began to hear reports of people talking about the incident at the

Embassy. One delegate called from Farth, and just happened to mention it...

"I presume the whole galaxy knows by now... even the Klingons!" Sarek confided to Amanda.

"That's one Vulcan conference they won't forget in a hurry!" she smiled, looking at Spock.

He raised one small eyebrow. "Mother, I do not want to be an ambassador. I don't like the Embassy."

Neither Sarek nor Spock could understand why Amanda suddenly rushed out of the room. They could hear her laughter as she ran upstairs to her own room.

"Totally illogical." Spock looked up at his father.

Sarek nodded silently. Humans were illogical!



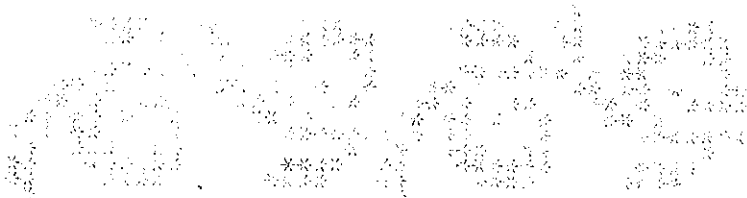
THE GAMBLER

I wake to find you holding me.

You tell me to lie still,
and it seems, here we are once more, my friend.
Same old game, same old deal.
And you're always there to help me when I'm hurting,
And God, it hurts, my friend, it really hurts.
Dragged you into another stupid mess;
guess, for that, I've only got my just deserts.
The indestructable here -
only, the whole point is, I'm not,
and I'm not just gambling with my life, Spock,
but also with yours.

You follow where I lead,
helpless to curb my impulsiveness
that forces me to carry banners
when, sometimes, I don't even know the cause.
I don't know why you keep pulling me out
of the fire;
I guess, because of feelings we both, long ago,
stopped trying to subdue.
But someday you'll be too late to help me, my friend,
and then I'll not only pay the price, but so will you.
Perhaps there are some who would call me selfish,
for I know it hurts you to let me be free;
but I can't help the way I am, Spock -
and, given the choice, would you really wish to change me?"

Faty Deery



THE HUNT

by

Beth Rayne

"A hunt - a Royal Hunt. You may go and hide in the forest, anywhere you like, and I shall seek. How does that strike you, Captain?"

"Strikes me very well, but you'll have to make it worth my while, Trelayne. Why not up the stakes?"

"The stakes?"

"Yes. While we're playing our game, free my ship. Let it continue on its way. In return I'll give you a contest you'll remember."

"Always back to your ship! Well, if it'll add spice to the pursuit... I accept your terms, Captain."

Kirk took out his communicator.

"What are you doing?" Trelayne asked suspiciously.

"Surely, General, you appreciate I must formally relinquish my command."

"Of course, Captain." Trelayne bowed. "My apologies. In the heat of the moment, I forgot."

Kirk contacted the Enterprise and ordered Spock to take command and continue to Colony Beta Six.

"Captain..." Spock interrupted quietly.

"Spock. General Trelayne has 'decreed' that the Enterprise is guilty of insurrection. And, in a way, he's right. As Captain of the Enterprise I accept full responsibility. He is, at present, considering my... punishment."

"Spock, I am only one man, and you are now responsible for the lives of over 400. Get the ship and crew away from this planet. Spock, I..."

"Enough!" shouted Trelayne, and he knocked the communicator from Kirk's hand and crushed it underfoot. "You will hide, NOW!" He waved his right hand, and Kirk found himself outside in the forest.

* * *

A stony silence fell over the Bridge of the Enterprise.

"Well, Spock, what are you going to do?" asked Dr. McCoy.

Spock turned very slowly, and McCoy found he was looking into eyes devoid of life. "Doctor, I am going to do as Captain Kirk has ordered and continue with our mission. The people of Colony Beta Six need these supplies."

The Bridge crew shivered at the sound of Spock's ice-cold, emotionless voice.

"You're not going to leave the Captain down there!" Scotty shouted.

"Mr. Scott, I have never disobeyed an order from Captain Kirk, and I do not intend to do so with his last."

McCoy had been emotionally stunned from the time Kirk had first contacted them, and had listened with detachment since then. Now he was furious, and was about to tell Spock once again what he thought of his emotionless attitude to life and other peoples' feelings, when their eyes met. He had never seen such anguish and torment. Spock's face remained passive, but his eyes showed what such a decision really meant to him.

McCoy tried to convey to Spock that he understood. "Can't you do something, Spock? We know the ship and crew always came first with Jim, but..."

"Doctor, our duty demands we deliver our cargo to Colony Beta Six as Starfleet and... Captain Kirk... have ordered." He turned abruptly. "Mr. Sulu, plot the swiftest course to Colony Beta Six."

"Yessir!" mumbled Sulu.

"Mr. Scott. What is the condition of our engines?" Spock asked.

"Well, Mr. Spock," answered Scotty, his Scottish accent pronounced, "this chasing about the universe trying to outrun Gothos certainly hasna done them any good, and they were due for..."

"Mr. Scott," interrupted Spock, "your Engineering report, please."

"Well..." Scotty consulted the board. "I'd say the overall performance is ... about 83% - if we take it easy, that is."

"How long will it take for the engines to reach their full capabilities?"

"Mr. Spock, I'd have to shut down the engines two at a time and then wait until they had cooled before I could begin. Good God, it would take ages!"

Spock exhaled a long breath. "Mr. Scott, I will not embark on my first mission as Captain of the Enterprise with her engines in such a condition."

Scott fumed.

"We will," Spock continued, "remain in orbit around this planet until the necessary repairs have been carried out. I want those engines in perfect condition, is that understood?"

Scotty's smile practically introduced one ear to the other. "Yes, sir... Captain."

"Then please proceed."

McCoy did not want to embarrass Spock in front of the Bridge crew. He approached the centre seat and placed a reassuring hand on Spock's shoulder.

Spock turned. "I'm not sure what we can accomplish against Trelayne's power, Doctor, but..."

McCoy interrupted. "At least we are here, Spock. At least we haven't abandoned him. Let's just take one step at a time."

Spock stared ahead. This Human, Leonard McCoy... Spock shook his head. He had expected a tirade after Jim's last order, but just when all seemed lost, when he needed understanding, a friend... McCoy responded.

* * *

Back on the planet, Trelayne slashed at leaves with his sword. "Ahah, I see you!" he yelled. Kirk dived to the side, and Trelayne's sword flashed over his head.

"You must try harder, Captain." The sword pricked Kirk's arm. "This is too easy."

Kirk broke a branch from a nearby tree and knocked the sword from Trelayne's hand; he picked the weapon up and lashed at Trelayne with all his might. The sword went right through him. Horrified, Kirk stared, but Trelayne, enjoying himself, bowed.

"Touche, Captain. I confess you've drawn first blood, but after all, I've never played before." Trelayne vanished, and so did the sword from Kirk's hand.

As Kirk made his way through the forest Trelayne lunged at him from behind a tree. Kirk ducked, and the sword became embedded in the tree. As Trelayne struggled to free it he turned and saw Kirk run off. He flicked his wrist, and a large rock flew through the air and thudded into Kirk's chest.

As if in slow motion Kirk sank to his knees and slumped forward onto his face, so badly injured that blood and vomit mingled freely in his mouth and

flowed onto the ground in an ever-widening pool. He felt a dagger-like pain in his chest. In those tortured moments between light and darkness, he found himself losing his grip on any emotion, all intelligence; even the pain was beginning to fade into one massive dull throb. His physical resources were nearly gone, his mind slipping from control, losing contact with reality, and the most terrible part was that he could do nothing about it.

He felt himself being shaken. "Invigorating. Yes, quite invigorating," a voice repeated over and over.

His vision blurred and distorted; he could vaguely distinguish a dim form leaning over him. He tried to speak, but could do no more than groan, mumble a few incoherent words and stare at the shadowy figure above. The agony in his side stabbed and twisted like a white-hot iron. Kirk pulled himself to a sitting position and gazed in agony through a red haze of pain as a broken rib cried out in protest. The unthinking movement made his side feel as if someone had squeezed his chest between a giant pair of pliers and twisted. Carefully, gently, he eased himself forward until he could see around him.

"Noble fight, Captain."

"Remember, Trelayne," Kirk said slowly, "you promised to let my ship go."

"Yes, but such sport! I must fetch them all back to play. So this is victory! It has a sweet taste. I will enjoy my future hunts!"

As Trelayne raved on, taunting Kirk, the Captain collapsed back onto the ground.

Beyond anger lies fury, the heedless, ungovernable rage of the berserker; and beyond that again, a long, long step beyond the boundary of madness, lies the region of bold and utterly uncaring indifference. When a man enters that region, as few men ever do, he is no longer himself; he is a man beside himself, a man outwith all normal codes and standards of feeling, thought and emotion, a man for whom words like fear and danger, suffering and exhaustion, belong to another world, and whose meaning he can no longer comprehend. It is a state characterised by an abnormally heightened clarity of mind, by a hypersensitive preception of where danger lies, by a total and unhuman disregard for that danger. It is, above all, a state characterised by an utter implacability.

It was in such a state that Kirk found himself only seconds after Trelayne had taunted him about the fate of his crew. His mind was clear, unnaturally so, swiftly weighing up the situation, balancing the possibilities and probabilities, racing ahead and formulating the only plan that could offer any hope at all of success.

His weariness, the sheer physical exhaustion, had dropped from him like a falling cloak; he knew the change as psychological, not physiological, that he would pay heavily for it later, but it didn't matter - he was oddly certain that, no matter what the source of his energy, it would carry him through. He was still aware, remotely, of the severe pain in his chest, but his awareness was no more than an intellectual acknowledgement of the wounds - they might well have belonged to another man. His plan was simple, suicidally simple, and the chance of failure so high that it seemed inevitable, but the thought of failure never entered his mind. He would keep Trelayne occupied long enough for the Enterprise to escape.

Trelayne went back to pull the sword from the tree; after a few attempts he became impatient, waved his wrist, and the tree vanished and the sword fell to the ground. As he retrieved it he was pushed aside by Kirk, who ran past and once more disappeared into the trees.

"Ahah - the hunt continues!" yelled Trelayne, once again brandishing his sword.

As time passed, however, Trelayne was becoming more and more annoyed. He did not appreciate Kirk's hit-and-run tactics.

"It isn't fair!" he moaned. "He's only Human. He should be tired by now. I've lost count of the number of times I've drawn blood. It isn't fair!" Deciding that the dense forest was giving Kirk too much cover, Trelayne waved his hand and the trees started to vanish, one at a time.

Kirk saw this from a vantage point and threw a rock far to his left. He smiled as he saw Trelayne turn in that direction. // That won't delay him for long, // Kirk thought. // He'll soon tire of this hunt and concentrate on the Enterprise. Must think of something! There must be a master control... The castle! // As he saw the trees disappearing one by one in the distance, Kirk turned and headed back to the castle.

* * *

The lethargy on the Bridge was rudely interrupted by DeSalle. "Something is certainly going on down there. Energy levels have been increasing over the past half-hour."

"Any life forms registering?" McCoy asked.

Spock answered quietly. "The force field has been intensified, Doctor. Trelayne will not be caught out like that again, I'm afraid."

"What's he using all that power for?"

"There is no use speculating, Doctor."

"Speculating! That lunatic down there could be... You're right, Spock... But... where's all that energy coming from anyway? Surely there is a limit to his power!"

McCoy did not really expect an answer. The waiting continued.

* * *

For the first time fear came to Kirk -- not fear of capture or injury, but the honest, cold fear of failing his crew, whose lives depended on his keeping Trelayne occupied.

Minutes passed that seemed like hours. How many? He didn't know, would never know. Time as a means of measurement no longer existed. His body was simply a robot going through repeated motions without benefit of constant comments from the mind. Kirk lay rigid, only his chest moving with the pulsating rise and fall of his breath. Slowly, as the waves of exhaustion receded to a level of sufferable tolerance, he pulled himself to his feet. He forced himself to keep going, to cling tenaciously to the thread of consciousness. The ground was rough and uneven in places, and he soon lost count of the number of times he stumbled and fell, wrapping his arms around his chest in a vain attempt to deaden the torture from the cracked ribs.

Each minute was an infinite unit of misery and suffering, of aching cold, of intense burning heat, of fighting for control of his mind. Time melted into an eternity which Kirk knew might not end until he fell against the soft damp grass for the last time.

In spite of his determination, he began to have doubts that he would live through the next few hours. One step in front of the other, an endless cycle that slowly pushed him further and further into total exhaustion. Only when he heard a muted alarm going off somewhere in the dim corners of his brain, warning him that he was straying off course, did he stop. His legs were cramped from exhaustion, and his breath was coming in agonised gasps that broke the still, clear air, but he struggled forward, urged on by an inner strength he didn't know existed any more. He blundered along in a void all of his own.

Then in the middle of climbing a small embankment his body turned off the switch to consciousness, and he collapsed like a deflated balloon just inches from the top of the ridge. Kirk knew he had crossed over the threshold from physical sensibility to the inertness of twilight sleep.

But something didn't quite jell. His body was dead; all pain gone, all

feeling, every Human emotion seemingly had died. Yet he could still see, though his total panorama consisted only of the grass-covered ground no more than a few inches in front of his eyes.

The superhuman, courageous effort had been wasted, the responsibility to his friends and crew now evaporated into the empty atmosphere. Kirk was past caring or knowing or sensing now; he could relinquish his hold on life and peacefully die where he fell. It would have been so easy to let go and fall back into the black pit of no return -- except for something that didn't belong in the picture, an illusion that shattered the whole concept of death.

A pair of boots. Two polished leather boots standing in front of his unseeing eyes where only moments before there had been an empty plot of wild grass. Phantom hands rolled him over on his back, and he became aware of a face framed by the vacant sky... Trelayne! He saw the alien's lips move, but darkness engulfed him as he strained to hear what he said.

When he regained consciousness he was back in the castle. As he tried to move it seemed as though his whole body was a mass of pain. His mind registered it automatically, but he disregarded it. There would come a time for suffering, but that time was not yet. That feeling of ice-cold indifference was still with him, more strongly than ever.

"Well, I wanted to get back here. Must try to find the controls." The door was unlocked. "Trelayne and his tricks again. Still, tally-ho."

He flattened himself against the far wall, cocked his head in listening, his eyes turned towards the open doorway. He slid noiselessly forward and risked a quick glance round the edge of the door. The passage was dimly lit, about twenty feet in length, with two closed doors at either side and one at the far end open, showing a white rectangle of light.

"The controls," whispered Kirk, but as he headed for the open door the scene changed, and he found himself outside with a sword in his hand.

"You were a worthy opponent, Captain. Therefore I think it fitting that you should die with a sword in your hand," Trelayne mocked.

Blindly fending off the lunging thrusts, staggering backwards under the fury of Trelayne's assault, Kirk hurled himself convulsively sideways over the parapet and plunged into the cool water of the moat below. Even as he dived Kirk heard the swish of the sword as it hissed through the empty air where his body had stood only an instant before.

Then there was the sudden shock as his shoulder collided with vicious force against the shallow bottom of the false moat. The pain exploded in him, and everything seemed to dissolve and stop. His ribs felt as if they were burning inside his chest, the fire spreading into his back and shoulders.

Pulling himself onto the landing, Kirk stood unsteadily, swayed, and only kept erect by using the sword as a cane, somewhat bewildered to find the hilt still clasped tightly in his hand. He crouched on one knee, fighting to catch his breath, waiting for his heart to slow down to a reasonably normal rate.

Once more Trelayne appeared -- fresh.

Kirk raised his sword and brought it down on Trelayne's wrist. Trelayne's sword vanished over the parapet and into the water below. He swung round, the cold blue-grey eyes flashing with anger and frustration. He knelt, and his voice was hard and metallic. "It seems I am your prisoner."

Kirk wasn't fooled for an instant. The words were only a stall, a curtain to shield another trick. Kirk stepped back.

A blow, like the thrust of a red hot poker, jerked Kirk sideways and knocked him backwards down the stairs. The steel ball had torn through the fleshy part of his thigh, missing the bone by a scant quarter of an inch and leaving a neat little reddeing hole at the entrance and a slightly larger one at the exit. The burning sensation quickly left, and his leg became numb with

shock - the real pain, he was sure, would soon follow. As he tried to move the burning sensation returned in earnest. If he hadn't known better Kirk would have sworn that a microscopic man was running back and forth through his wound with an old-fashioned flame thrower. Once or twice he nearly blacked out; each time he fought desperately to hold on until the engulfing waves of darkness subsided. On sheer will power alone he kept his voice on a conversational tone.

"Back to square one, Trelayne."

"You are beaten, Captain!"

"But not defeated, Trelayne."

"You are defeated. I won. You're beaten. I won!"

Kirk sat quite still, absorbing the pain that burned his leg, wondering how long Trelayne would talk before taking further action. It would be impossible to go on much longer. His vision was beginning to blur around the edges, but he was aware that Trelayne had stopped raving and had regained his sword, thrown away the musket, and was poised for a killing thrust.

Kirk, the tired expression on his face reflecting the gnawing pains in his ribs and leg, could do no more. The last thing he remembered before the soothing blanket of darkness fully covered him was the sound of a female voice.

"Trelayne... Time to come in now, Trelayne..."

* * *

Kirk became increasingly aware of the brightening light and the stinging smell of pure fresh air. He looked around. Trelayne was gone. A bright pulsing light hovered above him.

"You must forgive our child. We would not have let him intercept you had we realised your vulnerability. Forgive us, Captain."

A male voice emanated from the pulsing light. "As you have seen, Captain, we can produce the outward appearance of Earth-like objects, but I'm afraid that with your primitive structure I hesitate to attempt any repairs to your injuries."

Kirk heard as if through a long tunnel. He knew he was losing consciousness again.

"... return to your vessel."

"The Enterprise is many light years from here," Kirk smiled weakly and mumbled, "safely on course for Colony Beta Six."

"Your injuries would be attended to aboard your vessel?" the voice persisted.

"Oh, yes," Kirk mused. "Bones would take care of..."

The voice interrupted. "Your vessel is orbiting Gothos. I will take you there."

"But..." Kirk started. Then he found himself engulfed in the bright green light.

* * *

Once again the Bridge crew were startled when DeSalle shouted, "Mr. Spock, the force field has gone!" Then his face fell. "There are no life forms registering, sir."

Spock hurried across to the sensors, followed closely by McCoy.

"Spock?"

"Mr. DeSalle is quite correct, Doctor. There is..."

"INTRUDER ALERT! INTRUDER ALERT!"

"Pinpoint location," ordered Spock.

"SICKBAY."

Spock and McCoy headed for the turbolift. "You have the con, Mr. Scott. Order a Security team to Sickbay."

Both parties arrived at Sickbay at the same time, and as they entered a bright green light seemed to engulf them - they couldn't move.

The voice asked Kirk, "Will these beings restore you to health?"

Kirk peered through pain-filled eyes and as he nodded weakly saw Spock and McCoy being released from the force field.

"JIM!" McCoy cried as he ran forward, appalled at the state of his friend.

Kirk had unsuccessfully been trying to stop the bleeding in his leg, and a widening pool of blood had gathered on the floor.

"Spock, help me get him on to the bed. Careful with his leg."

As they picked him up, Kirk tried to bite back a cry of pain.

"What's the matter, Jim?" McCoy asked. He was puzzled, as they had been very careful not to move the leg at all.

"Ribs!" said Kirk through clenched teeth.

McCoy shook his head. "The sooner I get you to the mediscan the happier I'll be."

As Kirk was carried to the bed, the bright green light was never far from his side.

"Spock. I thought I ordered you to get this ship to safety."

"Jim, I..."

"The crew were your responsibility, Spock." Kirk tried to sit up. "You had no right to risk..."

McCoy interrupted, "Well, Spock, tell him about the engines. Don't just stand there."

"Doctor, I hardly think this is the time to..."

"What's wrong with the engines?" Kirk demanded.

"Chasing around the galaxy trying to escape from Gothos didn't exactly do our already over-worked engines much good, so..." McCoy stared at Spock, "... we decided that as we were orbiting a planet, we..."

Although exhausted, Kirk gave a little smile when he noticed how McCoy stuck up for Spock.

The trio had, for the moment, forgotten their guest. They were rudely reminded of his presence when he interrupted McCoy. His voice boomed an apology, and, "I will visit your engine room before returning... home."

"But..." started Kirk, "WHO...?"

The light had gone.

A few seconds later Scotty's voice called from the Bridge. "Security team to Engineering. There's something weird going on down there."

Spock went to the intercom. "Cancel that order, Mr. Scott. Repairs are being carried out. All is in order."

"Oh, all right, Mr. Spock," Scotty answered.

Spock looked non-plussed at Kirk.

McCoy whispered, "I've never seen Spock look so embarrassed." And as he turned to get a hypospray, "You need rest."

"The engine performance should soon be to your satisfaction, Mr. Spock. I

think we should continue our mission, don't you?"

Spock nodded. "Mr. Scott, take us out of orbit when ready and make for Colony Beta Six at warp 4."

"But-what about Captain Kirk? You can't just..."

McCoy went to the intercom. "Scotty, you're not questioning an order from your commanding officer, are you?" McCoy winked at Kirk.

"No, Doctor, but..." Scotty started, bewildered, "surely you're not..."

McCoy decided enough was enough. "It's okay, Scotty. Jim's safe here in Sickbay. Now, how about Colony Beta Six at warp 4?"

"Ach. Right, then. Warp 4 it is... CAPTAIN McCoy."

McCoy jabbed the hypo into Kirk's shoulder and looked at his two friends.

Kirk smiled as he fell asleep. "It's good to be back - I think."

McCoy replied, "It's good to have you back - we think," looking across at Spock.



DARKNESS AND LIGHT

When first we met,
It was as if we were
A million miles apart.
We were so different,
So apart in culture, belief,
And appearance.
And yet, despite all,
There was an immediate affinity,
A tangible similarity in the soul,
And we were drawn to each other.

The years passed, and we grew closer.
And we grew in realisation
That differences were not necessarily different.
There were enhancements to our lives,
Additions, and progressions,
And we came to know
That our lives were a light
In the darkness.

... But we did not forget
The power of that darkness...

Karen Hayden



THE THREE WISHES

by

Linda C. Wood

The Enterprise's science and research teams were carrying out a full-scale orbital survey on an M-Class planet circling a yellow star. Kirk, at the con, sat back and admired the beauty of this world, so like Earth except in its land-mass configuration. He swivelled round to address his First Officer.

"Report, Mr. Spock?"

"An M-Class planet in climate and topography, Captain. I am now surveying for life-form readings. There are no radio or television transmissions emanating from the surface. There does, however, appear to be a thinly-distributed humanoid population, but I am unable to ascertain at this moment what stage of advancement they have attained."

"Continue scanning, Mr. Spock. Bones, isn't that a beautiful planet? Pity there are already people on it, it would have been perfect for colonisation."

"Yes, Jim," agreed McCoy, "but we are at opposite ends of the galaxy - the cost of transportation of personnel and equipment would be prohibitive. Still, it is a beautiful world. Don't you agree, Spock?"

"Doctor, one M-Class planet closely resembles all the others, and I see no beauty in it."

"Why you insensitive, green-blooded, pointed-eared son of a Vulcan, you wouldn't recognise beauty if it was staring you in the face!"

Spock's eyebrow went up to meet his hairline, but he refused to rise to the bait, returning his glance to the scanner.

"Spock," continued McCoy relentlessly, "How I wish you could be Human for long enough to see things through our eyes."

No sooner had McCoy spoken than mischievous, chuckling laughter was heard on the Bridge. "Your wish is granted!" said a strange voice, and a 3-foot tall apparition with very green skin, pointed ears, and dressed all in green materialised beside the straightening Spock. The being touched Spock, and both disappeared.

"Spock!" yelled Kirk - but Spock was not there. "Intruder alert! Chekov, Security search throughout the ship for the intruder and Spock, and at the same time scan the planet's surface for a Vulcan life-form reading."

A few minutes later Chekov reported, "Captain, Security search negative on board, and there are no life-form readings for Mr. Spock on the planet's surface."

"Damn! And Spock had no phaser or communicator with him. There could be anything down there! Continue scanning. Security search team prepare to beam down to the planet to the exact coordinates the ship was surveying when the intruder appeared."

* * *

But Spock was nowhere near the beamdown point of the searchers. Coming to with a start, he thought he heard mischievous laughter again, then he heard the voice, coming from he knew not where, saying, "Two more wishes on the Crock of Gold!", but he could neither see nor sense a presence.

It was dark, and he was in a leafy glade in a heavy forest area. When he had scanned the surface on board the Enterprise, he had detected many heavily-wooded areas, but now he deduced by the air temperature that he was somewhere in the mid-Northern hemisphere during their summertime. It was pitch black, as the planet had no moon, and he was without any kind of orientation equipment, so he decided to stay put till dawn. He did not hear the mysterious voice again. Finding that he was standing under a large oak tree with a cavity in the bole, he

crept into the shelter -- which proved a tight fit for his six-foot frame -- curled up to retain his body heat, and drifted off to sleep.

* * *

The rising sun of a summer dawn crept up over the horizon, bringing the woodland to a chirping, squawking life, and the sleeping Spock to wakefulness. He crawled out of the protection of the bole of the tree, stretching his cramped limbs. There was a lake glinting in the sun nearby, so he walked towards it to attend to his morning ablutions.

The water was mirror clear, and when he bent over to wash a shock shook him to the very core of his being -- the face that stared back at him from the water was not Vulcan... it was Human!

His hands shot to his face. His ears! His elegant, pointed ears were gone! The tips were rounded! His eyebrows were rounded too, and his hair had grown a couple of inches overnight, and had fallen into a natural style. Even the complexion of his skin was altered -- he was a sunburned brown, not green!

He immediately channeled his thoughts inside himself. His psychic powers were gone, and he felt different internally -- his heart was beating under his left breastbone, and not in his right side as it should be.

What had McCoy said just before he was spirited down to the planet? 'I wish you could be Human for long enough to see things through our eyes.'

Oh, no! He had been changed into a Human! For the first time in his life he felt panic -- a Human emotion. Now, how could he be returned to normal? Was he to be Human for the rest of his life?

The faintest remnant of his Vulcan training reasserted itself. "Don't panic, relax, think logically," he said to himself. "I must try to communicate with the ship, but I do not want them to see me like this. First, try to find a habitation for shelter, and, perhaps, information."

He looked around to find the tallest tree in the neighbourhood, found it, and climbed as high as he could. It was far enough -- he could see a whisp of smoke in the distance, possibly from a homestead. Taking his bearings from the sun, he headed towards it, marking his route by cutting branches from bushes and trees as he went. It was a lovely morning, and he realised he was enjoying his walk through the forest. "Enjoyment?" Another Human emotion!

After a half-hour walk he came to the glade where a log cabin was located. He watched for a while under cover of the forest till he saw someone coming out of the door and walking towards a well nearby. It was a young woman.

Not wishing to frighten her, he quickly decided on a story about being robbed and lost in the woods, dirtied himself up to disguise his Starfleet uniform a little, and staggered out of the undergrowth in full view of the girl as she returned to the cabin. He stumbled and fell melodramatically, and allowed the girl to approach him as he lay in a pile of leaves.

She turned him over, saying, "What's the matter? What's wrong?" in a gentle, lilting accent.

Spock opened his eyes, planning a piteous groan, but when he looked at her it turned into a grunt of amazement -- the girl was beautiful, with long auburn hair and laughing green eyes softened in concern for his welfare.

His latent Human emotions reacted very suddenly, in a way he was not prepared for. Without really understanding what was happening to him, he was experiencing love at first sight.

The girl, looking down at the face of this tall, lean stranger, saw a dark and handsome man with an interesting face and strange dark-brown eyes. She felt a sudden happiness and a stirring within her, and smiled down at the stranger, who this time managed a more convincing groan.

"Are you hurt?" she asked him.

Still bewildered at the intensity of his new-found emotional reactions, Spock held his head and sat up, managing to stammer, "I- I've been attacked - robbed - in the woods."

"Can you stand?"

He hesitated for a moment until he had controlled his unwelcome reactions, then he got to his feet and she helped him into the log cabin. She gave him a bowl of hot soup, and he feigned recovery as he felt its warmth reach his hungry stomach.

"Thank you," he said, smiling (smiling!?) at her.

The smile the girl saw lit this sombre man's face with its radiance. Once again she felt a stirring within her as his deep voice relaxed her.

"I must try to contact my friends," Spock explained.

"Where are they?" she asked.

Thinking quickly, Spock replied, "They said they'd meet me in the nearest town - how far away is it from here?"

"The nearest town is Branwell, and it's about an hour's walk from here. I have to get provisions for my father and me today, so I'll walk there with you."

Spock's inherent curiosity came to the fore. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Brinid," she replied. "And yours?"

Not knowing what local names sounded like, he decided on his own. "Spock."

"That's a strange name - are you from far afield?"

"Yes," he replied pensively. "Very far afield."

"Well," she said, "if we have to walk into town and back today, we'd better set out."

"You mentioned your father - where is he?" enquired Spock.

"Oh, he works for the local land owner in the forest as a woodsman. He will return before the sun sets, and I must prepare his evening meal before then."

They set out along the leafy pathway towards Branwell. The more Spock talked to her, looked at her beautiful face and heard her lilting voice, the more difficult he found it to quell his Human emotions. She said something amusing, and Spock heard himself laughing (laughing!?) with her. She liked his quiet, confident laugh.

Some little way down the pathway, Brinid gently slipped her hand into his. He stopped, turned to her, his eyes gentle and a happy smile on his face.

"Brinid, has anyone ever told you you're beautiful?"

"N-no," she stammered.

Gently, tenderly, he took her in his arms and kissed her, finally succumbing to his natural Human reactions. She found herself responding...

"Come on, we must get to town," Spock urged.

They walked hand in hand for the rest of the way, Spock feeling a contentment he had not known before except in Jim's company, Brinid enjoying her tall dark man's companionship.

* * *

Back on the Enterprise, Kirk was growing increasingly anxious about the safety of his First Officer.

"Still no Vulcan life-form readings, Captain," reported Chekov.

"Continue scanning. If Spock is there, he'll try to communicate with us."

Lt. Uhura, keep all channels open for a transmission from the planet's surface."

"Yes, sir," she replied.

Kirk stopped to think for a moment, then moved to Spock's computer console. "Computer."

"Working."

"Detail any life-form known with the following description: 3 ft tall with pointed ears, green skin and green clothing."

"Affirmative. Earth Irish folklore relates to a race called leprechauns that were reputed to have magical powers. Habitat: heavy woodland in Southern Ireland."

"Leprechauns!" snorted Bones, who had joined Jim on the Bridge. "Now I've heard everything! As if we hadn't enough to contend with with a six-foot Vulcan!"

"Mr. Chekov, concentrate scanners on woodland areas in the mid-Northern and mid-Southern hemispheres."

"Yes, sir. Still no trace, Captain."

"Maintain scanning."

* * *

When Spock and Brinid reached the little town he looked around for any items that he could use to construct a communicator of some sort to transmit a message to the ship. Unfortunately, the development of technology on this planet was nowhere near the point where such items were available or could even be manufactured. Spock looked at every face to see if he could recognise anyone from the ship, but without success.

Brinid, meanwhile, purchased the provisions she wanted, and met up with Spock in the square. "Have you found your friends?" she asked him, smiling.

"No," he replied, returning her smile. "I think I may have missed them."

"Oh, where will you go now?"

"I don't know," Spock replied honestly.

"Come back with me and meet my father," she suggested brightly.

Looking forward to the return walk, Spock agreed.

* * *

Just before sundown, the woodcutter returned. When his eyes landed on Spock, he exploded. "Who might you be?"

Spock rose from the seat he was sitting in, and just as he was about to reply, Brinid said,

"This is Mr. Spock, Father. He was attacked and robbed in the woods while going to meet friends in Branwell. He collapsed in our back yard, I revived him, we went to Branwell, but his friends had gone, so I invited him back here for the evening."

"Oh, very well, then," the man said gruffly, but with a doubting look on his face.

Brinid cooked the meal and served it quickly. To Spock's dismay, it was meat that was set down before him. He tasted it hesitantly, but his Humanised palate found it tasty, and he enjoyed the meal, as well as the mead supplied to wash the food down.

Unused to intoxicating drink, he found he was talking more than he should be, and heard himself say that he's encountered a three-foot tall being who had made a wish come true. The woodcutter was immediately interested, and asked Spock where the tree was that he had sheltered in overnight. Spock suddenly sensed something in the man's manner that belied his innocent interest, and decided to

to adopt evasive tactics again. His curiosity was aroused, however, and he wondered why the man wanted to know where the large oak tree was.

As the evening drew on, Brinid laid out bedding for Spock to sleep on, and they all retired to their respective resting places.

Spock waited till he was sure the woodcutter and Brinid were sleeping, then slipped quietly outside and, following the track he had laid that morning, he made his way towards the location of the oak tree, sensing that the answer to his present predicament might be found there.

Lacking his Vulcan senses, he was unaware that the woodcutter had been awakened by his exit from the cabin, and was following some way behind - the man was an expert tracker, and had lived in these woods all his life. Over his shoulder the man had slung a crossbow and a quiver of arrows.

When Spock arrived at the tree, he first circled it to see if he could detect anything unusual about it. Seeing nothing, he then entered the bole and, crouching inside, searched for he knew not what. He again thought about his unwanted Human appearance, and found himself murmuring, "I wish I could be returned to normal again." His head started to spin, and he blacked out.

Curious to see what was happening, the woodcutter approached the oak tree for a better view, his crossbow armed and ready in his hands.

Spock quickly regained his senses, and immediately felt different - his Vulcan strength and appearance had been restored. He crawled out from the bole of the tree, to be faced by the approaching woodcutter - who saw a tall, green man with pointed ears.

In sudden panic the woodcutter took hasty aim at the apparition and let loose an arrow which, before Spock could avoid it, thudded deep into his chest. The impact of the bolt threw him back against the trunk of the oak tree. With a look of amazement at the arrow sticking out of his body, his hands grasping the shaft, Spock shook his head once in disbelief, then pitched forward to the ground, where he lay unmoving.

* * *

"Captain, I have a Vulcan life-form reading!" called Chekov. "But, Captain, I'm losing it again!"

"Kirk to Sickbay. Bones, get to the transporter room immediately. Chekov, give Mr. Kyle the coordinates you have for Spock to lock in on."

Sprinting to the transporter room, Kirk yelled, "Energise!" the moment he and McCoy jumped onto the pads.

* * *

The woodcutter was bending over the fallen Vulcan, and was just about to pull the arrow out when the transporter shimmer drew his attention. Terrified, he ran for the cover of the trees.

Kirk felt shock as he saw Spock lying there with an arrow in his chest. He ran to his side, cradling the still, grey-faced form in his arms.

"Bones, see what you can do for him!"

McCoy ran his scanner over Spock. Kirk saw the look on his face.

"No! It can't be! He can't be dead!"

"Jim, the arrow went straight into his heart - there's nothing I can do."

"Spock, no! You must live! I need you beside me, Spock. I wish you to live!"

Suddenly Spock's whole body jerked convulsively, he coughed, and his eyes flickered open, looking up at the man who held him close. His face a mask of pain, his breath coming in short, painful gasps, Spock's cold hand reached up weakly to grasp Kirk's. "Jim?"

Kirk could hardly hear his whispered name. "Spock! Can you hear me? Hold on, don't move, we'll get you up to the ship immediately." He flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise. Three to beam up. Medical team to the transporter room immediately."

And in a shimmer they were gone.

* * *

The woodcutter, trembling with fright at what he had just witnessed, could not move for several minutes, then he got up from his hiding place and walked slowly back to the house. He knew that what he had come for had ceased to exist - the third wish had been wished and granted, and there was now no crock of gold in the bole of the old oak tree.

* * *

Up on the Enterprise McCoy operated on Spock to remove the arrow and repair the severely damaged heart muscles.

Kirk, after taking the ship out of orbit and heading for Starbase 8, went down to Sickbay.

After several hours in the operating theatre McCoy emerged, exhausted but happy at the success of the operation.

"How is he, Bones?"

"He'll live, Jim. But I just don't understand. He was dead, but he came back to life again when you held him and said, 'I wish you to live.'"

"I've been looking at the computer readout on leprechauns while you were operating, Bones. It says that legend has it that if you find a leprechaun you can make three wishes on a crock of gold. It looks as if our mischievous leprechaun was real, and our wishes came true; but I wonder if Spock had any wishes come true, too?"

"Maybe you should ask him when he's fit enough. I'm pretty sure that double-sized leprechaun of yours won't tell me what he'd tell you!"

* * *

Two days later Spock was well enough to receive visitors.

"Spock, you realise you were dead?"

"So Dr. McCoy tells me."

"I wished you alive and you came back - how do you account for that?"

"I'm very glad you did, Jim - it was the last wish."

"Oh, and what, pray tell, was the second wish?"

"Very curious, Captain. When Dr. McCoy said he wished I could be Human, I awoke on the planet's surface and discovered that I had assumed a totally Human appearance and body, internally and externally. When I realised what had occurred, my second wish was to return to my normal appearance."

"Tell me, Spock, did you experience Human emotions too?"

"Yes," replied Spock, very quietly.

"That must have been a unique experience for you."

"It was an... interesting experience."

"And your Human appearance? That must have been quite a shock for you."

"Indeed it was, Captain, but my appearance was apparently quite pleasing to female eyes."

"Oh, what female?"

"Just... a young lady I met along the way," evaded Spock, not meeting his Captain's eyes.

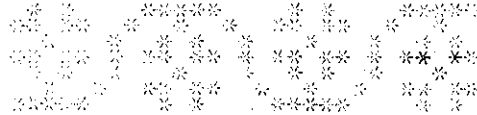
"Did you... love her?" pressed Kirk, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"Really, Captain, I do not know what you mean," replied Spock, a scandalised expression on his face, and obviously uneasy under cross-examination.

"No, of course not, Mr. Spock."

But Kirk looked his Vulcan friend straight in the eyes and was rewarded with an escalating eyebrow. Jim Kirk could guess the rest.

"I think it could be said that you have the luck of the Irish, Mr. Spock."



PROPOSAL

Soft tread echoes close behind, turning me
from this windowed view.
All logic flees, I quail within, catching
first sight of you.

AMANDA...

You stand more serene and noble than I remember,
Furnishing the softness of your eyes
Deep into my Vulcan heart.

Your words are softly spoken,
Uncertainty catching a sudden, excited breath.
"Why are you here?"

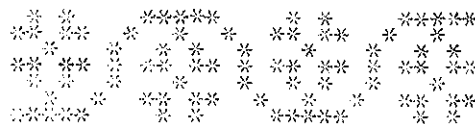
WHY INDEED...?

I turn my eyes away to hide my need.
Words tumble forth, crisp and cool.
"I request thee be my wife!

There... it is finally said.
Seconds are held suspended, each passing as an hour.
Slowly I turn once more... this is an agonising task.

Your gentle smile plays havoc with my Vulcan soul.
As you declare - quite logically -
"Why Sarek... I thought you'd NEVER ask!"

Cladys Oliver



What do you get if you cross a Klingon with a parrot?
I don't know, but if it says "Pretty Polly" - SMILE.

* * * * *

FRIENDSHIP HAS A LOGICAL REASON

by

Vicki Richards



Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise could probably claim to understand Vulcans as well as any Human in the galaxy, and as well as all the other things his friendship with Spock was, there were a few occasions when it proved useful. Besides the countless times his Vulcan friend had managed to save his neck in one situation or another.

Now was one of the occasions when it was proving very useful; it was extremely handy to have a working knowledge of Vulcan etiquette when your orders told you to transport a Vulcan VIP. Every time James Kirk thought of high-ranking Vulcans, the image of an imperious T'Pol always sprang to mind. And for Spock's sake, he wouldn't want to make a fool of himself in front of their visitor.

Kirk stood next to Kyle at the transporter console, watching the transporter shimmer as it produced the form of a tall, elegant Vulcan with noble features and dignified bearing.

The Captain stepped forward and raised his hand in the traditional Vulcan salute, able as he now was to perform it with ease, and welcomed his alien visitor with a wholeheartedness he did not very often feel for visiting dignitaries.

His years of friendship with Spock had given him a deep respect for the Vulcan people, in this case enhanced by the fact that the Vulcan scientist he greeted had been a childhood contemporary of his First Officer.

'Friend' was probably too strong a word, for the eminent Mr. Seren was a full-blooded Vulcan in every sense, but from something Spock had let slip on hearing that the scientist was to be a passenger on the Enterprise, Kirk had gained the distinct impression that this Vulcan standing in front of him had been far kinder to the young Spock than had many of his classmates. For that, Kirk was prepared to offer the Vulcan a warm welcome indeed.

"Live long and prosper, Mr. Seren." Kirk gave the formal greeting, then smiled, determined to be friendly without offending the Vulcan by his natural Human openness. But from what Spock had said, Seren believed in IDIC, more truly than many. Still, James Kirk wished to show the Vulcan his respect.

"Welcome aboard the Enterprise," he continued. "We're honoured to have you aboard, sir."

"Thank you, Captain," replied the Vulcan as he stepped down from the platform. "The Enterprise's reputation goes before it. I also am honoured, and gratified that my journey to Epsilon Polaris is to be aboard an efficient ship."

As he accompanied the Vulcan from the transporter room, Kirk was aware that Seren was one of those few people for whom it was possible to form an instant liking. But compliments aside, Seren had to be a worthwhile person, apart from his not inconsiderable scientific achievements, for he seemed to have been able - even as the child he had then been - to show at least a little consideration and kindness to Spock at a time when the young half-Vulcan had been so alone because of his heritage.

Kirk understood very well that the Vulcan children had been unable to accept Spock as one of them. Not out of deliberate cruelty, but because they were offended by, and uneasy of, his Human half, which was capable of displaying the Human emotions they found so distasteful, whether Spock had even shown them or not. Probably, it was also because they recognised in Spock their own suppressed emotions, and it frightened them, even if they didn't know it.

Now, of course, it was a totally different story. Spock had become a

respected and honoured scientist, and Vulcan was extremely proud of him. But Kirk was very glad that, at a time when the young Spock had had so many difficulties to face, there had been at least one person of his own age who had not been completely thoughtless towards him.

Seren was actually very similar to Spock in appearance. Most Vulcans were physically attractive, a fact they seemed unaware of (or preferred to be unaware of) and Seren was no exception. He did indeed look impressive in his Vulcan robes, and Kirk couldn't help but be amused by the glances, hastily covered, that he got from the various female crew members as they made their way through the corridors of the ship.

After seeing Seren to the quarters prepared for him, Kirk made his way to the Bridge to relieve Spock, feeling quite pleased that their visitor had accepted his invitation for him and Spock to take him on a tour of the ship after they had come off duty. Seren was an important man; his clan was almost as respected on Vulcan as Spock's, and apart from the fact that Kirk was grateful to him for early kindnesses - though probably unconsciously done - to his friend, he was also exceedingly relieved to discover that the Vulcan seemed fairly easy to get along with. Kirk had too many memories of VIPs whose stays aboard the Enterprise had turned into diplomatic nightmares. With any luck, ferrying Seren to his destination ought to go without a hitch.

Two hours later, the Enterprise's Captain and First Officer were on their way to their guest's quarters. Kirk looked sideways at Spock, wondering if, as he thought, his Vulcan friend was looking forward to renewing the acquaintance. Spock had been his usual reticent self on the matter, apart from letting Kirk know that Seren had shown him some consideration all those years ago, and Spock seemed to have clammed up since then. But James Kirk knew Spock, if anyone did, and he was positive Spock was glad of the opportunity to meet the other Vulcan again.

Seren greeted them at the door to his cabin. He showed no outward response to Spock, other than the dignified bowing of his head, which Spock returned. Kirk found himself having to remember that this was a full-blooded Vulcan; Seren had not been blessed with a mother like Amanda. But he wished the scientist could show some sign that he acknowledged the friendship, if it could be termed that, which he had shown Spock in childhood.

Perhaps he was seeing it all through a Human's eyes, no matter how hard he tried not to. Perhaps it was just that he wanted to convince himself that Spock hadn't been truly alone during those early years on Vulcan. Yet even if that was the case, Kirk couldn't understand how anyone, Vulcan or not, could know Spock without being touched in some way by the unique person he was.

"Captain Kirk - you are punctual," commented Seren. The Captain took it as an oblique compliment, although he knew full well the Vulcan would only be stating the facts as he observed them.

"I always try to be," replied Kirk politely. "I believe you know Mr. Spock, my First Officer?"

"Indeed," replied Seren, nodding slightly. He turned to look at Spock, for the first time seeming to admit that he did actually know Spock from Adam, or whatever the Vulcan equivalent was. "I am honoured to meet you again, Spock. Our childhood days in ShiKahr were interesting, were they not?"

"Indeed," replied Spock, his only comment. Those times were long past, and the memories touched him no longer, if he did not let them. They no longer had the power to hurt him, as they once had. He acknowledged the truth of it. Not just because he was a Vulcan, no matter what those children had said long ago, but also because he was partly his mother's child, and had finally found in Jim Kirk the friendship he had thought he would never come to know. Spock knew that Jim, despite his intuitive insight, thought that he, Spock, felt some kind of friendship towards Seren simply because he had not tormented him like the others; not a friendship such as he and Jim shared, for there never could be

another bond like theirs, but some sort of fellow-feeling nonetheless.

When he had been a small, lonely boy on Vulcan, he had indeed been grateful that at least one of his contemporaries had been above the illogical behaviour of the others, but that had been because Seren was intelligent, even by Vulcan's high standards, and even at so early an age had understood the principles and ideals of IDIC with far more insight than the other young Vulcans.

Seren had merely acted logically and properly towards him, showing the respect for another, however different, that any adult Vulcan would. But at the time Spock had been grateful for that, even knowing as he did that as a full Vulcan, Seren was not capable of feeling friendship towards anyone; his training would not permit it. It had simply been such a relief to find there was someone who would not taunt him.

Now, so many years later, Spock was not at all surprised that Seren had become an eminent and honoured scientist; his intellect would enable him to reach the top in any field. Spock had known of his progress, of course; despite the now-healed breach with his father, Spock had kept abreast of happenings at the Vulcan Science Academy, so far as his Starfleet career had enabled him to do so. Spock did respect Seren, and was even still grateful to him for his correct manner in childhood, but he could not, and would not, offer Seren an emotion which he would find distasteful - and an emotion which Spock reserved for Jim Kirk, and his other friends on the Enterprise.

They toured the ship in a threesome. The conversation was, of course, extremely logical, but Kirk could swear that Seren was positively enjoying himself, even if the Vulcan didn't know it. And Kirk knew that Spock definitely was having a good time; no-one else would probably have ever noticed, but Kirk could tell that his First Officer was most certainly showing off the ship to Seren, as well as showing him around it. Especially the Science Section.

When they came to Sickbay, James Kirk was extremely glad that Bones appeared to be on his best behaviour. Not the slightest Vulcan-baiting wisecrack was forthcoming, and Kirk knew instinctively that it was out of the oft-denied feeling he had for Spock that McCoy was doing his utmost to act in a manner a Vulcan would consider impeccable. He could see the 'thank you' in his Vulcan friend's eyes; Spock had learned a long time ago that Jim was not the only person on the Enterprise who cared about him, and he knew that friendship existed too, whether he or McCoy admitted it openly or not.

Christine Chapel, however, was indeed impressed by the tall Vulcan scientist. Years of hiding her feelings concerning Spock had schooled her well enough for there to be little difficulty in keeping what she really thought of Seren out of her expression, but as she watched the two men and the two dignified Vulcan walk from Sickbay together, she couldn't quite repress the smile which grew on her face. She definitely did like their eminent passenger. He wasn't Spock, of course. No-one ever could be; there was no-one in the entire galaxy - probably the cosmos - quite like Spock. But Seren certainly had something.

* * *

Two hours later, Seren was in his cabin. He switched off the viewscreen on which he had been studying some of the latest computer designs. Spock had been extremely helpful in allowing access to some of his own research. He then began to prepare himself for the formal dinner with Captain Kirk and his senior officers to which he had been invited.

Seren fully expected the dinner to be an interesting occasion; the Humans he had met so far on the Enterprise were indeed fascinating. Humans were fascinating, though inexplicable at times. He had spent most of his life on Vulcan, among members of his own race; the last nineteen years had been spent in worthwhile occupation at the Vulcan Science Academy. Now he had progressed to the position where Starfleet had specifically asked that he be the one to undertake this mission; to travel to Federation colonies as an advisor in installing and maintaining the many types of computers in practical usage.

He was grateful for the opportunity to travel the galaxy and study the infinite diversity of its life, but although he could, at last, appreciate some of what made sentient beings seek out the stars and their new worlds, still he could not entirely understand what had made Spock go against the wishes of his family, joining Starfleet when he could have been a worthwhile and respected member of the Academy. To Seren the Academy was all, new worlds notwithstanding, and had Spock chosen to serve there he would surely by now have attained a higher position than Seren himself.

The chance to travel on the Enterprise was a unique one insofar as it gave him the means to study Humans at first hand. Seren had always understood and believed in the revered ideals of IDIC, and he knew well that the Terran race, despite its rampant emotionalism, had many qualities of worth. He wished to understand how they could function efficiently while handicapped by their feelings. It was clear that Spock, whom he had always respected, was able to work alongside them without undue difficulty - in fact, the Enterprise was widely known as the best ship in the 'Fleet, and the working partnership between the Vulcan First Officer and the Terran Captain was becoming almost legendary, even on a planet such as his own.

From what he had seen so far, the Enterprise was truly as efficient a ship as her reputation foretold; yet Seren simply could not see how this could be so when all of her crew, with the exception of one, were not wholly dedicated to the principles of logic.

Spock, of course, was half-Human, a fact which had been apparent in their childhood days. He had seen then how Sarek's son tried so hard to be accepted as a true Vulcan. Seren had deemed it immature when their classmates had been offended at the rare signs of emotion in the hybrid; it seemed they did not fully understand IDIC as their elders did. But now it appeared that Spock had finally won the battle with his Human emotions; Seren could see no evidence of them. For Spock's, and Sarek's, sake, he was gratified. Of course, Spock's Human heritage would nevertheless have surely made it easier to serve among Humans than it would have been for a full Vulcan? Were his emotions completely extinguished? For the purpose of scientific interest, Seren determined to find out.

* * *

The formal dinner was as interesting as the Vulcan had expected. Present were the Captain, the First Officer, the Chief Medical Officer, and the Chief Engineer. The first three he had already met, of course.

He was truly impressed with Kirk's knowledge of Vulcan customs. Clearly the Captain was doing his best to make him feel 'at home', as he believed the Human expression went.

The doctor said little, and seemed to be content to listen to his discussion with Spock and the Engineer. Lieutenant-Commander Montgomery Scott was a mass of contradictions - an incredible mass. A fascinating study, and Seren found himself wondering how a man who clearly possessed strong emotions could possibly be one of the best Engineers in the galaxy, another of the Enterprise's legendary characters.

Yet he was; his theories on engineering matters were among the most advanced and logical the Vulcan had ever heard, yet he simply did not understand how the Scot's emotions didn't hamper him in his work. If the Engineer had been a Vulcan, he would certainly have been a genius...

"Well, excuse me, gentlemen," said the Engineer politely, rising from his seat not long afterwards. "It's been verra interestin' talkin' to ye, Mr. Seren, but there's work waitin' for me. I must get back to my bairns."

"Your bairns?" asked Seren, clearly puzzled. The Vulcan noticed Dr. McCoy appeared to be choking on his drink. It was almost as if his words had caused it; but surely it could not be connected?

But Scotty had gone, and it was left to Spock to explain.

"'Bairns' is a Scottish colloquialism for 'children'," explained the First Officer, wishing heartily that McCoy would have more success in keeping his face straight than he was doing at that moment. Up until now the Enterprise officers had all behaved in a manner perfectly in keeping with Vulcan customs, a fact for which Spock had been extremely grateful. For some reason it was very important to him that Seren should leave the Enterprise with a good impression of his Human friends and colleagues.

Spock was more than relieved when McCoy made a polite excuse and left - not, unfortunately, before Seren had noticed his peculiar behaviour. However, much to Spock's relief, Seren did not comment on the matter.

"There is something I wish to understand," their guest said seriously to the remaining Human and Vulcan, taking both Kirk and Spock unaware. "It has to do with the field of what I believe are referred to as 'human relationships'. Would either of you be offended if I were to ask you some questions relating to this subject? Purely out of scientific interest, you understand."

Kirk and Spock looked at each other momentarily, and Spock knew that he was in for some more leg-pulling about 'Vulcan curiosity' when he and Jim were alone. Kirk smiled, and Spock nodded. The Vulcan knew his Captain and friend would never do or say anything which might create difficulties for him.

"No, of course not," Kirk replied, knowing he had Spock's assent.

"Thank you," replied Seren, pausing a moment before continuing. The respect for personal privacy was a basic tenet, and he was uncertain that what he was about to ask might infringe on areas Humans, let alone Vulcans, considered private. Yet the only way he could learn what he wished to know in order to aid his research was by asking. And they had given their permission, although Seren could see that Spock was rather surprised by his request. But James Kirk appeared to be a logical enough person, for a Human, and surely he would inform him if his words were likely to cause any offence.

"I have spent much of my life on Vulcan," he went on, "and have had little opportunity to study other races at first hand. The principles of IDIC suggest that we should learn as much about the diversity of the universe as possible. I find Humans a fascinating study. History proves that the Terran race has many worthwhile qualities, including the drive which causes them to take so active - and valuable - a part in Federation life. What I wish to understand is how is it possible for Humans to make such an effective contribution when they are hampered by violent emotions? I fail to understand how it is logically possible."

Kirk couldn't help but smile. Seren's words had sounded so like a speech Spock might have made a few years ago.

"As long as emotions are used properly," Kirk tried to explain, "they can be of great use to a race. The Human 'drive' you speak of, for example. There are other things which emotions can give us. Their rewards can enrich our lives - positive emotions, such as caring and friendship, for instance. I do understand that the Vulcan way is a good way; but for Humans, emotions are an essential part of life, and I doubt that we could operate as effectively without them. And, whether it seems logical or not, it is possible to do the things we have to without them getting in the way."

Seren nodded, digesting Kirk's words. "I understand, and agree with part of what you say, Captain; the fact that this ship is known as one of the most efficient in the Fleet is proof of what you say. However, might it not also be true that part of this efficiency is due to her having a Vulcan First Officer? Do you not think that Spock is able to bring a logical viewpoint to matters which you might not otherwise have?"

"Spock's abilities as First Officer and Science Officer have always been one of the most important contributing factors in making this ship what she is,"

Kirk stated firmly, glad that he had an opportunity to tell the Vulcan how much he valued Spock - or at least a little of what he thought of him. "It is my belief, however, that Vulcan logic and Human emotion can complement each other quite successfully."

Seren nodded again, thoughtfully. "Possibly. Then that must also hold true of Spock himself." He turned to the silent Science Officer. "You have far more knowledge of Humans than I, Spock - do you agree with your Captain's views? What difficulties do you encounter in working alongside Terrans?"

Spock steepled his fingers in momentary thought, then spoke. "I do agree with much of what the Captain says," he affirmed. "Although I admit I have found Human emotions and traits difficult to comprehend on occasion, I do recognise that emotions are necessary to their proper functioning. To abide by the laws of logic and control is to me the only efficient way to conduct matters; however, it is also true that for other races there can be, and are, other ways, which, if not better, can be equally as good."

"And what of personal relationship, Spock?" asked Seren. "Forgive me if I intrude, and do not answer if you wish, but... is it possible for a Human, who must surely always see everything in an emotional light, to function as a truly successful team with a Vulcan who must by nature view things differently?"

"I'll answer that," put in Kirk. "You've already said how efficient a ship this is. That couldn't ever have been true if Spock and I didn't work well together. We do. Very well. I wouldn't say we never disagree, but we make a good team."

"And would you consider him your friend, as a Human might, or as an officer under your command?"

"As both, but first and foremost as a friend," Kirk replied, looking Seren straight in the eyes and hoping that his answer wouldn't embarrass Spock. But he just couldn't lie about their friendship, especially to this Vulcan who clearly wanted to know the truth. And if he could make him understand, just a little...

Spock was having difficulty concealing the pride he felt at Kirk's answer. And he could see which question Seren was going to ask next. He saved him the trouble, and answered first.

"And I consider Captain Kirk to be my friend, Seren. Mutual respect is a good basis for friendship." Spock was remembering how he had so desperately wanted, all those years ago, to be seen and acknowledged as a true Vulcan, without any sign of emotion at all. And now, so long after, he found that although Seren's respect was important to him, for nothing would he deny Jim's friendship - not to himself, or to anyone.

"Is that logical, Spock?" asked Seren. It wasn't a condemnation, merely a question.

"I believe that it might be," replied Spock, gaining great satisfaction from the slow smile which was spreading across Jim's face.

* * *

Several days later they said goodbye to Seren and prepared to leave orbit around Epsilon Polaris. Sitting in his command chair, Kirk was smiling to himself as he remembered that after-dinner conversation. It had pleased him so much, for Spock's sake as well as anything else, that his Vulcan friend had felt able to confirm the existence of their friendship, even in front of another Vulcan whose respect Spock obviously valued.

It had also said a great deal for Seren that, although he was still unable to understand such an emotion, he had been neither disapproving nor sceptical about it. Kirk almost chuckled out loud when he recalled Bones' consternation when he had Spock had told him of the exchange.

"I'm receiving a message from Epsilon Polaris, Captain." Uhura's business

like tones came from behind him, "They have an emergency - the colony leader reports that Dr. Seren requires assistance immediately."

"What kind of assistance?"

"Unspecified. Just assistance."

Minutes later Kirk, Spock, McCoy and three Security guards were in the transporter room. The coordinates Uhura had received caused them to rematerialise only yards from the main complex of the colony. Waiting anxiously to meet them was a small, middle-aged woman.

"Thank the stars you've come!" she exclaimed, walking forward. "I'm Ronaldson, Colony Leader. Dr. Seren was just settled in when the emergency occurred. It's the reactor. We've had trouble with it before, but this time it's serious. The Vulcan says it's going to overload if he can't do anything with it. Can you do anything?"

The three Enterprise officers exchanged glances. There was likely to be no time for mass evacuation of the colony.

"Has Dr. Seren given any indication of how long it will be before an explosion occurs?" Spock, as always, asked the pertinent question.

"In about ten minutes," Ronaldson replied. "It went critical without any warning. The alarm system failed. It's so old, you see, and..."

"Then an evacuation is out of the question." Kirk cut her off short; there was no time for superfluous words. He had no doubt that a Vulcan scientist's estimation would be accurate. "Spock, get over there and see what you can do. I'll..." He was interrupted by his communicator bleeping.

"Captain!" Scott's worried voice came over. "The sensors have detected an imminent reactor overload. Ye'll have to get back up here straight away."

"Not before we've seen if we can stop it, Scotty," Kirk replied, his eyes anxiously following the blue-shirted Vulcan form disappearing into a nearby building. "But stand by for emergency beam-up on my signal, and prepare to leave orbit the instant we're back on board. Beam Dr. McCoy up now. Kirk out."

McCoy disappeared in the transporter shimmer before he had hardly begun to protest.

Kirk headed off in the direction Spock had gone, determined at all costs to prevent the Vulcan - both Vulcans - from taking any unnecessary chances. Where the lives of a whole colony were at stake, Spock and Seren just might consider it logical to risk both their own lives. But he knew Spock wouldn't risk his Captain's unnecessarily, and Kirk intended to stay right there by his side until the last possible moment, when he would make damn sure that Spock, and Seren, got out in time. The beam-up would be on his command, not dependant on the logical calculations of two Vulcans whose logic might just become flexible where the lives of others were concerned.

He entered the reactor room to find the two Vulcans working side by side at a console. They didn't appear to notice his entrance, so immersed were they in their task. But Kirk knew that Spock had seen him. With one eye on the chronometer he set himself to watch the two Vulcans working as patiently and silently as he could. They didn't need interruptions now.

Minutes ticked by. The room was becoming hotter. Kirk couldn't tell if the two Vulcans were succeeding or not, though if the reactor's warning indicator was still working correctly, it didn't look as if they were.

"Spock!" Kirk said quietly in his friend's ear, when he decided the time had come for him to have to speak. "There are less than two minutes left, if Seren's calculations were right. We may have to get out of here very soon."

"I am aware of that, Captain," Spock replied in a completely normal voice. "However, I believe we are making progress. We cannot leave yet."

"When it gets critical we're beaming up," Kirk replied warningly. "That's a direct order, Spock. I mean to stay here and make sure you obey it."

Spock looked at him, just once, then returned to his work. He knew exactly what Kirk meant - and the lengths their friendship meant they would both go to if it was necessary for the safety of the other.

In near silence Spock and Seren struggled to bring the computer created reactor malfunction under control. An explosion would destroy the whole colony. It was almost more than a poor Human could do to stand and watch. There were barely thirty seconds of the estimated safety margin left when Spock heard Kirk opening his communicator. He knew exactly what Jim intended.

"No, Jim - not yet!" he insisted, looking directly at Kirk. The correct Vulcan was gone - this was the Spock who was Kirk's friend talking. "A few more seconds is all we require. I promise you, Jim. You know I would never risk your safety."

Kirk nodded. It was many years since he had learned to trust Spock totally - a trust that would never be broken. The safety margin had almost run out; if by some strange chance of fate Spock should be wrong, it would be too late to beam up. But he would still have time to tell Scotty to get the Enterprise out of there - he knew enough to tell the moment. For the colony, there would be no escape.

But Spock was not wrong. Moments later the threatening indicator began to decline, and the ominous whine in the room started to subside. Smiling with relief, Kirk called the ship and told Scotty to go off red alert. Then he looked at the two Vulcans sitting there as if nothing had happened. He should have known that with two Vulcans working on it, success was a foregone conclusion. But he could have sworn that the pair of them looked just a little smug.

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The colony was safe, and the Enterprise awaited them. The beaming down of equipment Seren would need to modernise the machinery that had caused the danger had been completed. He was primarily a computer expert, but, like Spock, could turn his hand to practically anything if it should be required. And looking after the needs of Federation colonies was part of his job.

Seren turned to say goodbye to the three men standing in front of him. Two of them he had known for so short a time, yet he was indeed grateful that he had met them. He had no doubt now that Captain Kirk deserved his reputation as one of the best Starship commanders in the 'Fleet.

Chief Medical Officer McCoy was also outstanding in his profession, despite his rampant emotionalism; a paradox which Seren still could not quite comprehend. He might not yet have learned to understand Humans totally, but after his stay on the Enterprise he had certainly come to appreciate some of their qualities.

And the respect he had felt even in childhood for Spock had grown immeasurably. Sarek's son had truly become someone Vulcan could be proud of. Seren was gratified that, somewhere along the years, Spock seemed to have finally found himself.

"Live long and prosper, Captain, Dr. McCoy, Spock." Seren saluted each of them in turn. "Meeting you, and travelling on your ship, has been a most interesting experience. Before you leave, there is something I wish to say."

Seren regarded the three before him, the three who shared a very special relationship, and he thought of the friendship between Kirk and Spock, the friendship he had seen demonstrated so dramatically in that reactor room, in a way that words could not have achieved.

"Friendship may or may not have a logical reason," Seren told them enigmatically, "but I believe it may have its rewards."

Kirk's grin was growing ever wider as he gave the order to energise. McCoy's

was threatening to beat it. Spock wasn't exactly grinning, but he wasn't exactly the stone-faced Vulcan either.

"Peace and long life, Seren," Spock replied. "And... thank you."

As the transporter effect began, Kirk realised how grateful he was to Seren. Not just for his past kindnesses to Spock any more, but now also for his approval of their friendship. Seren had made it clear that he saw no reason why Spock should deny that he did feel friendship for Kirk, and Spock knew it. And he wouldn't forget how Spock had been very prepared to state the fact openly whether he had Seren's approval or not.

And besides, Kirk was beginning to think that it was, after all, very logical.

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VIRGIN MEMORIES

Karen Hayden

It had been a virgin land
 When first we had beamed down
 Upon the grass of green.
 Untouched by anything but nature.
 Ochre sands beneath the sun of red.
 Beauty and peace surrounded us all.

I watched my Vulcan inhale the air,
 His eyes remembering his own land of red,
 And I could see the pain
 That memory caused.
 A childhood pain enhanced by adult
 Interpretation of what was.

Intrusion would have been wrong, unjust,
 So I gestured the others away,
 But I stayed near, and he knew
 That I was there if need be.
 In time he threw aside the past
 To return to my side, and reality.

We continued on, surveying all,
 And his dark eyes alighted
 On the large blossoms, so fragrant,
 Beneath the Earth-like trees,
 And another memory from another time
 Came gushing to the surface of his mind.

What could I do?
 How could I have known
 That this planet was so like those
 We had seen before?
 If I could have saved him that pain
 I would have done so willingly.

But when I looked again
 Upon his normally controlled features
 They were lit with a smile of happiness,
 And I realised anew that though pain
 Dwelt in the memories induced,
 He was also feeling joy and happiness.

I smiled in return, understanding, and drew to his side,
 And in mutual acceptance
 We walked on to face our future, together...

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